

Great Places

READING ON THAMES FESTIVAL

What people want and making the festival known

2019



Reading on Thames Festival

What people want and making the festival known

March-April 2019

Organisers of the Reading on Thames Festival commissioned this research in Spring 2019 in order to find out what sort of events people want to see in Reading, and how they get to know about them. Sally Lloyd-Evans of the University of Reading oversaw the research and the Whitley Researchers were involved in conducting some of the interviews. John Ord and Alice Mpfu-Coles facilitated three focus groups and Lorna Zischka undertook analysis of a wider survey.

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Summary Findings

226 people filled in questionnaires about what they would want to see at a Reading on Thames Festival. They were also asked where they sourced information about Reading events, so that the organisers can work out the best way of making the festival known. 131 questionnaires were disseminated online via community organisations. 95 were taken out into the community on paper, allowing us to capture responses from a wider demographic. Moreover, three focus groups were held, one with BAME respondents, one with young professionals and one with young people. The results are summarised below.

Knowledge of Reading on Thames Festival and factors affecting engagement

- The Reading on Thames Festival is not yet well known. There was little or no awareness of it in the focus groups. However, 48% of those completing the survey had heard of the festival and 23% had attended it. The greater awareness among survey respondents was due to the inclusion of respondents with direct links to the festival organisers. Amongst others, there was some name confusion with Reading Festival.
- In response to the question 'Does the Reading on Thames Festival sound like something you would be likely to attend (or attend again) in 2019?' 52% of the survey sample ticked 'likely'; 42% ticked 'depends'; and 6% ticked 'unlikely'.
 - The festival had wide appeal, both to those who already knew about it and to those who did not. However, people already engaged in art and cultural events (i.e. 55% of survey respondents) were especially interested.
 - The festival appealed mostly to local residents. Students, visitors and those living right outside of Reading were significantly less engaged with Reading's cultural offer.
 - The particular appeal of this festival seemed to lie in its celebration of Reading itself; its river, culture, assets, local talent and heritage.
 - Although local artists were preferred, quality was a strong theme. Quality of performance as well as quality in the organisation of the festival and its venues. "Please ensure the festival is something Reading can be proud of."
 - Variety was another strong theme. Something for all ages, incomes and ethnic groups, and a range of different ways of celebrating Reading.
 - Older and younger people were equally likely to express interest in the festival. Even school-age children are enthusiastic, but unless their parents are involved, they depend on the organisers engaging with the school for information and a way in.
 - The cost-conscious (62% of this sample) are just as interested in the festival as others, although whether they actually come may depend on ticket prices. Cost-conscious people tend to be less engaged in Reading's cultural offer generally.
 - Significant price reductions were suggested for people bringing multiple children and for people on a low income.
 - The importance of having some events that are free was affirmed.
 - Women tended to express more interest in the festival than men, although there was no gender imbalance amongst those saying they actually attended.

- The festival and programme appealed to ethnic minorities just as much as to the white British. Having said that, a few comments made in the BAME focus groups suggest some sense of exclusion from these kind of events, and special efforts may be required before everyone feels welcome to join in.
- People with poor health or with a disability were particularly enthusiastic about the festival, and were well represented at previous festivals.
- Caring for children or working in a paid job did not influence interest in or attendance at the festival. However, the festival appealed more to people with higher levels of qualification. The highly qualified were also more engaged with cultural activities generally.
- By postcode, the most interest in the festival was expressed by those in the West of Reading (even though people from the West of Reading were no more likely to have taken part in cultural events than people from other places). The least interest in the festival was expressed by those in the South, who were also disengaged with cultural activities generally.
- Location matters.
 - Being in places of interest and natural beauty is high on the wish-list, which may affect the choice of location.
 - Ready access to facilities like toilets and access for the disabled was mentioned.
 - People most frequently mentioned town centre locations as being accessible by foot or by bus (e.g. Forbury gardens, the Abbey ruins, Christchurch meadow and other areas along the river, Broad Street, museums and art centres... Such venues also have a high visibility factor in terms of making the event known. However, lack of access to low-cost or free parking concerns some.
 - People were keen on having a mix of indoor and outdoor events, and a variety of locations. A few even wanted sub-events spread right across Reading, although others felt that everything should revolve around the river and there were concerns for quality over quantity.
- It was suggested that events could be spread out over a period so as to enable more people to come to at least one (but not at the expense of quality).
- Food matters. Good food by local companies should be on hand.
- There were multiple mentions of ensuring that the festival celebrates our natural environment and actively promotes protection of the environment.
- There is huge potential to draw people in, although the step between interest and actually attending is a big one. Including marginalised groups requires personalised attention. Getting representatives from these groups involved in running the programme is a way that marginalised groups suggest inclusion can be expanded.
- Reading is not rated badly as a place to live, but neither does it get top ratings. “Mediocre and generic” was one representative description. However, interest and engagement in the art and cultural scene was found to be associated with people feeling more positive about where they live. Many people (especially the less informed) are not even *aware* of what is on offer and that they are missing out.

Programme content (ordered by level of interest)

- **Performances:** Food and music came out as the most popular of all events (less than 12% not interested) and especially amongst students, younger people and people not usually into art, culture and heritage-related events. However, people who expressed interest in actually attending this festival were rather more interested in celebrating Reading through other performances as well (dance, drama etc.). They wanted something distinct from the music events already on offer. Big outdoor events like a river pageant with fireworks and light installations were also mentioned. Many liked the idea of consistently revolving everything around Reading and the Thames and making this the festival's unique 'identity'. Comedy shows were significantly less popular than all other stage performances (21% of all persons were not interested) though they were somewhat more popular with younger people.
 - Some were keen to see famous talent brought in, but many more favoured celebrating Reading using Reading talent, pointing out that some of the local talent is in any case famous. (It was emphasised that quality is essential, but there is excellent local talent to draw on). The festival can also be regarded as a showcase for local artists and community initiatives that continue their work throughout the year, helping people connect into the on-going art and culture scene.
 - *Variety* was considered essential. Some child-friendly events. Multi-cultural. Representative of Reading's diverse community. Considerable emphasis was given to interactive events, with younger people being particularly keen.
- **Visiting places of interest and natural beauty:** Very highly rated by all demographic groups, with less than 13% not interested.
- **Film screenings:** Also popular with all demographic groups. Less than 14% not interested
- **Heritage or history focused events:** Just 15% not interested. Local history and heritage, along with walking tours and debates were of especial interest to those who said they wanted to come to Reading on Thames Festival. These events likewise held more appeal to residents (over students) to people already engaged in cultural activities, to older people, to white British (over ethnic minorities) to higher qualified people and to the least cost-conscious. Events will have to be carefully planned and marketed in order to appeal beyond this niche audience. For example, some people commented that instead of talking about 'art culture and heritage,' the festival should be marketed as a fun day out. Likewise, walking tours held more appeal to ethnic minorities than straight history talks. People liked to discover interesting new places but some are less keen to walk far. Debates (particularly outside of local issues) were significantly less popular than talks or tours based on local history.
- **Art installations/exhibitions:** 17% not interested. Art is another subject which appeals particularly to those who are already art and culture savvy. Women tended to be more interested in art installations and exhibitions than men. Students expressed less interest than residents.
- **Fetes with stalls, games, side-shows, rides etc.:** Although 23% of those interviewed were not interested in fete type events, a majority find them appealing and the appeal is similar for all demographic groups, even for those who do not usually attend cultural activities. Additional suggested activities including pottery throwing, boules related games, archery, bookstalls, fire-eating and other acts could go well as part of a fete-style event. Opportunities to showcase local talents and interests (on stage and on side stalls) was also seen to be potentially inspirational to Reading's young people coming up.

- **Hands-on art, craft and food making:** 32% not interested. The hands-on events were more appealing to women than to men, but otherwise, had broad appeal across all the different demographic groups monitored in this survey.
- **Performing and volunteering:** Performing yourself or volunteering behind the scenes is clearly not going to be for everybody, and yet only around half of the respondents completely counted themselves out, and there was no one demographic group more interested than another. Interest and support can be drawn from all.
- **Sport related activities:** More appealing to students or to people who do not much like where they live than to others. Otherwise, well over 50% were not interested.

Publicity

- Sources of information, in order of the proportion of people claiming it as their source:
 - **Word of mouth:** (Mentioned by 74% participants, particularly ethnic minorities). Problematic for people who are not surrounded by friends connected into the art and cultural scene – these people have little chance of finding out what is going on. Even amongst those who might pick up on information, there is little interest to attend unless friends are talking about going as well.
 - **Social media:** (Mentioned by 71% of participants, particularly White British). Facebook was easily the most important source of social media information. Twitter was mentioned next. Community emails/ email signups had some impact and Instagram had just 4 mentions. People depended partly on information sent out by organisations, but even more so on information they forwarded to one another after one person in the network had got it.
 - **Fliers and posters:** (Mentioned by 45% of participants, particularly older people). Posters were seen buses, at bus stops, across the town centre, in parks and on local notice boards. Posters or fliers are also seen in the library, on campus, in museums, in the Town Hall, at the Hexagon and in supermarkets, local shops, cafes, pubs and restaurants. A few mentioned fliers through the letterbox. Getting information from fliers and posters was strongly correlated to people taking part in art and cultural activities, and yet people who got their information in this way had not necessarily heard of the festival more than others. Perhaps not enough advertising has been carried out in this way for the Reading on Thames Festival in the past?
 - **Online search:** (Mentioned by 42%). There was mention of looking things up in response to marketing notifications when wanting to find out more. People also might go directly to a webpage containing centralized sources of information/local news. Thirdly, mention was made of happening across event information when searching for something related or when browsing.
 - **Community organisations:** (Mentioned by 27% of participants, and especially older people). Creative groups, support groups, libraries, museums, churches, political parties and other community groups were all mentioned. People who got their information via a local organisation were significantly more likely to have heard of the Reading on Thames Festival than others and they were also significantly more likely to be taking part in art and cultural activities. This makes local organisations important channels of

information and engagement, but probably also because they represent people who are already 'in the loop'.

- **Through schools (17%) or workplaces (15%) (27% combined):** Less important than links to community organisations but still important, the campus, workplace or a child's school are places where people gather and network and are therefore significant sources of information. Schools can be a place to reach people who have no other point of access. For example, people with cost worries were more likely to access information via schools.
 - **In press:** 18% people (especially older people) mentioned local newsletters and newspapers as their source of information.
 - **Local radio:** (for example, Radio Berkshire). The least important source of information but still significant for 16% of those interviewed. More so for the residents of Berkshire who had passed their mid-thirties and for men.
- Local media is often disseminated via social media, through online websites and in print. People accessing media in any of these ways tended to have been more likely to have heard of the Reading on Thames Festival than people who did not. These people were also somewhat more engaged with art and cultural activities than others.
The most frequently mentioned centralised source of information was Get Reading. Reading Arts, Reading Chronicle, Explore Reading, Reading What's On, Reading Freegle, Round & About magazine, Whitley Pump, Wokingham news, Reading Borough Council, Meridian News, Primary Times, Midweek and wherecanwego.com were also mentioned.
Specific groups/community organisations/museums that people had signed up to also sent out information. For example, there was mention of the Reading on Thames notifications and of other specialist groups.
 - It was mentioned that the problem with the press, radio and online websites is that they can only advertise the information that they are fed, making it impossible to get the whole picture of what is going on in Reading from one source. People have to search out information and *few make the effort*.
 - Older people more likely to have heard of the festival, but were neither more nor less likely to have attended than younger people.
 - People who were already engaged with art and culture events were better informed – they were 2 or 3 times more likely to have heard of Reading on Thames Festival than the disengaged.
 - It was suggested that if local performers were used, this would attract a wider number of locals to attend (especially from ethnic minority groups who are more reliant on word of mouth to spread information).
 - It was also suggested that the programme may sell better to the less engaged if advertised as a fun day out rather than as an arts and culture related event.
 - People need to know about (and be reminded of) events in good time in order to plan them in and in order to get around to booking.
 - Having to book is an added hurdle and having some events which do not require pre-booking may increase their accessibility

Full Findings

Introduction

The Reading on Thames Festival is a celebration of Reading's people, history and landscapes and is funded by Great Places, Reading Borough Council and Reading UK. The 2018 festival included events that took place indoors, as well as in parks and on Reading's streets. The programme included live music, circus, dance, films, creative activities, food, walking and guided tours. Local and national artists were both involved in producing the events.

Planning is underway for the 2019 festival and the organisers sought input from Reading's people, particularly regarding (1) awareness of festival - including where people get their information from such that the organisers can discover the best ways of advertising the programme; and (2) the kinds of things people would like to see at the festival including where the gaps are in Reading's art and culture scene. The organisers want to be sure they are pitching the festival correctly; creating a distinct character that engages a wide variety of people and ensuring that they convey the information efficiently.

There were multiple strands to this research, including focus groups targeting specific sectors of the population, light-touch informal conversations, and a survey. The first section of this report concerns the findings of the survey, and later sections add the findings of the focus groups and conversations.

The Survey

Lorna Zischka 2019

1. Who was interviewed

A questionnaire was disseminated online through the following channels and organisations:

- The Reading on Thames Festival twitter feed
- University of Reading departments
- Through community organisations including the Art and Heritage forum, SupportU (accessing the LGBTQ community), Culture Mix, RVA, Readipop, Jelly, RBL, Reading Rep, Junction Dance, Beautiful Creatures, RDPN, Rock Academy, Drishti Dance, RISC, RRSB, Connect Reading, Weller Centre, Globe, Mapp centre and Dee Park

Contacts within these groups were also invited to forward the survey on to their own social networks.

Paper versions of the survey were also carried out. These boosted the sample amongst people less connected into the above art-related organisations. In particular, they targeted South Reading residents (who are known from previous surveys to be significantly less engaged with the town's creative offer than interviewees from other parts of Reading), and Reading's black community (who had less awareness of the Reading Thames Festival than the online respondents). 226 responses were gathered overall, 131 online and 95 on paper. Although sample bias is an issue (the findings differ according to who you talk to) it may be noted that we were able to capture responses from a variety of demographic groups (different ages, different ethnicities, living in different parts of Reading and from people both familiar and unfamiliar with the sort of events that Reading on Thames puts on). Although over two thirds of the survey respondents were women, we still captured responses from 60 men whilst 4% preferred to self-identify or else refused to state their gender. Appendix 1 gives a full description of the persons interviewed in this survey.

2. Knowledge of the Festival and other cultural activities, and liking for where you live

Just over half of the respondents had taken part in art, culture or heritage-related events similar to the ones discussed in the survey in the last 6 months (55%). Likewise, around half the interviewees said they had heard of Reading on Thames Festival (52%). Of those who had heard of the festival, 47% said they had actually attended. It may be noted that twice as many people answering the online survey had taken part in events, or heard of or attended the festival compared to those taking the paper survey. This demonstrates just how much the outcomes differ depending on who you talk to.

Older residents of Reading (from their 40's on) were better informed about cultural activities going on in Reading than younger people, and were somewhat more likely to attend as well, although not with statistical significance once the (less engaged) students were taken out of the sample. Students, visitors to Reading and those living right outside of Reading were significantly less engaged with Reading's cultural offer. Cost concerns were also correlated to lower participation in cultural activities. The race and gender of those we interviewed made no difference to cultural engagement.

People who had taken part in Reading on Thames Festival tended to be the sort of people who were engaged in cultural activities generally. Those engaged with Reading's art, culture and heritage-related events generally also tended to be better informed; they were almost twice as likely to have heard of Reading on Thames Festival than those outside of this loop.

Residents of Reading were fairly positive about liking to live where they do, giving their place an average score of 4.1 out of 5 (they agree but not strongly agree). Students and visitors were less positive, marking 'where they live' down by a good half point. Reading does not get top ratings as a place to live, but neither is it rated badly.

Being interested in and wanting to engage in the town's cultural offer has something to do with the way people rate where they live: On average, those who had taken part in art, cultural or heritage related events (including those who had taken part in the Reading on Thames Festival) rated their appreciation of where they lived almost a third of a point higher on a scale of 1 to 5 than those who had not (a statistically significant difference). Even those who said they *wanted* to attend the festival but were not recently engaged in similar activities tended to rate where they live more highly. This outcome depends on other demographic factors too. For example, people with less financial worries or who are better connected also feel better about where they live, and this could affect their participation in cultural events too. However, even controlling for these demographics, the relationship between interest in the festival and liking where one lives still holds, suggesting that providing the festival and making it known and accessible goes together with people feeling more positive about where they live. As one person commented, "Reading is mediocre and generic, events such as this* [*Reading on Thames Festival] are much needed."

3. Interest in attending the festival and factors affecting this

Following the short description of the festival that comprises the first paragraph of this report, participants were asked whether this would be something they would want to attend (or attend again if they had already been). Overall, this was the response:

Would you attend/attend again

Unlikely	6.0%
Depends	42.5%
Likely	51.5%

Around half the respondents were enthusiastic, and very few had no interest at all. The rest said it 'depends' (on things like the programme, the cost, the time and place and how it all fits with other commitments... factors influencing the decision were explored in later questions). The large amount of people reporting 'depends' and the small amount showing no interest at all indicates the huge potential there is to draw more people in.

Having heard of the festival before had no significant impact on the desire to attend. That is to say, the festival sounded just as appealing to less-informed persons as it was to those who were more aware of Reading's cultural offer. The appeal seems to be broad. Having said this, there was an especial interest in the event amongst persons who had attended similar events in the last 6 months. 3% of these said it was 'unlikely' that they would attend Reading Thames Festival, whilst 9% of those who did not usually attend such events felt it was unlikely that they would attend Reading

Thames Festival. Even given this statistic, it is still the case that over 90% of persons who do not usually attend such events had some interest in this one, and there was particular appreciation for the fact that it was intended to celebrate Reading itself, picking up on our local culture, assets, talent and heritage.

It can be a large step between hearing about and having a general interest in the festival and then actually attending it. This is illustrated by the finding that just over half of the respondents who already knew of the festival had not actually attended it in previous years. Even those who had heard of it and said it was likely they go had not necessarily attended before (over 40% had not).

In terms of the other demographics of attendees:

- Minority groups expressed more interested in the festival than the White British, even if this interest had not translated to a proportionally larger representation of ethnic minorities in attendance in previous years. This finding appears to be biased however by the approach of one particular interviewer who gathered a significant number of responses from Reading's black community. Excluding this person's interviews, no statistically significant difference in festival interest is found between ethnic minorities and white British. At least it may be safely said that minority groups are no less interested in the festival than other parties.
- Students were significantly less interested in the festival than residents.
- Excluding students, older and younger people were equally likely to express interest in the Reading on Thames Festival.
- Being concerned about the cost had little correlation with attendance at the festival and none with *desire* to attend.
- The enthusiasm seemed to be greater amongst females than amongst males, although the gender of actual attendees in previous years did not appear to be one-sided.
- Wanting to go was not affected by having a job or not, or having kids.
- People in poor health or with a disability were particularly enthusiastic about the festival, and were well represented in previous festivals.
- The festival appealed more to people with higher levels of qualification. Certainly higher qualified people were found to be more engaged with cultural activities generally.
- And, as previously stated, people who usually attend these sorts of activities were the most enthusiastic about this one.
- People who did not like living in Reading tended to be less interested in the festival (and were less engaged in similar activities).
- By postcode, the most interest in the festival was expressed by those in the West of Reading (even though people from the West of Reading was no more likely to have taken part in cultural events than people from other places). The least interest in the festival was expressed by those in the South, who were also disengaged with cultural activities generally.

At one point in the questionnaire people were asked a completely open question about what would influence their decision to attend the festival, and later on they were asked what would make a difference to their level of interest in specific events. On the latter occasion, examples were suggested such as cost, location, whether an event is child friendly, who performs, support offered to potential performers, disabled access and friends who want to go. The question was still left open ended however – there were no boxes to tick. For analysis at the close of the survey, the comments

people wrote down regarding what would influence their decision to attend were put into categories.

3.1 What might influence the decision to attend:

No answer: 32% of people gave no answer. These people were significantly less likely to have heard of the festival before completing the questionnaire, and significantly less likely to have attended similar events in the past 6 months. The non-responders were neither more nor less likely than responders to say they wanted to attend the festival however, suggesting that they were not responding either because they were happy with everything that had been put forward or because it all made no difference to them. Responders mentioned the following influences, with answers now placed in order of popularity:

Programme content: 71% of all those interviewed mentioned something to do with the programme content. Because programme content is such a major point, it has its own section later in the report. However, the most frequently mentioned points were:

- Variety (for broad appeal);
- Quality;
- A strong Reading and river theme.
- Some were keen to see famous talent brought in, but more favoured supporting local talent (and some of the local talent is in any case famous).
- Some felt that the programme would 'sell' better if advertised as a fun day out rather than as an arts and culture related event.

Cost: Cost was mentioned by 35% of all persons interviewed as a factor influencing their decision to attend events.

- Later in the survey, all respondents were asked how big a part cost plays in their decision making. This is how they responded:

How big a part does cost play in your decision making?

Cost plays a minor role compared to quality	38%
Cost plays an important role	53%
I am only likely to attend the free events*	9%

*A couple of persons indicating that they are only likely to attend the free events added an exception clause – if an event was *really* special to them, they might pay.

- Those who attended similar events to those run at Reading Thames festival in the last 6 months were more likely to be willing to pay: 4% said they would only go to free events, compared to 14% of non-attenders indicating that they would only come if it was free. The cost factor then is especially important to people who do not usually attend art, culture and heritage related events.
- The cost factor was also especially important to women, and to respondents from the South of Reading. Other characteristics such as age, race, qualification, having a job or having kids did not have a statistically significant interaction with the way people responded.
- A few comments or suggestions were put forward by some of the people concerned about cost:

- Events can become very expensive for people with more than one child. Significant reductions should be made for children, and especially for multiple children.
- Significant reductions might also be made for multiple bookings and/or subsidised prices for certain groups (e.g. based on income, unemployment, being a student).
- The importance of having some events that are free was affirmed.

Location: 23% of interviewees mentioned location and accessibility as being factors of influence on whether they would attend an event.

- Ease of access included ready access by foot or by bus, and the town centre was generally considered to be a good venue in this regard. However, others were concerned about parking and felt the lack of convenient and low-cost parking facilities to be a barrier (concerns about access were closely linked to concerns about cost).
- Besides this, there were several mentions of the need for disabled access.
- Some were concerned that the venues should have ready access to facilities like toilets.
- Because making the festival known is an issue (see the later section on publicity), it is important to locate at least part of the festival where many passers-by will see that something is going on.
- The fact that people are very keen to be in places of interest and natural beauty (as shown by responses to this question) could also influence the choice of location.
- Mention was made of the importance of having a *range* of activities at a *range* of venues. In a later question all respondents were asked whether they preferred outdoor or indoor venues. This is how they responded:

Do you prefer outdoor or indoor events?

Indoor	8%
I like both	83%
Outdoor	9%

There was no evidence that indoor activities appealed specifically to one demographic group whilst outdoor activities to another. Again, variety seems to be the key. The weather is clearly an issue however, and there were multiple mentions by respondents to say that the weather would affect their attendance (even if they still liked outdoor activities).

Timing: 20% mentioned the day, time and/or finding the time to attend as influences on their attendance.

- The pressure of other commitments was particularly important. Attending a show is one thing, but getting involved in putting on events is an even bigger commitment that only a minority were in a position to offer time for.
- The date and timing of events is also important to be sure that people are free – and they need to know about the event in good time in order to plan it in to their schedule.
- It was suggested that events could be spread out over a period so as to enable more people to come to at least one.
- White British respondents and people already involved in cultural activities were particularly likely to mention time as a barrier.

Publicity: Advertising is a key issue, which has its own section later in this report.

- People need to know and be reminded about what is going on in good time in order to plan the event in and get around to booking.
- They ask for enough information about the event to know whether the programme, time and venue will fit their needs and interests.
- For some, the booking system may represent a barrier, and having some events that do not require pre-booking may increase their accessibility.

Company: The final main point affecting whether people will come concerns who people go with.

- 15% of respondents mentioned that they require child or family-friendly events. A couple were even more specific, saying they need autism or ASD friendly events. Women were more likely to mention the need for child-friendly events than men.
- A further 10% of people said that they would only go *with* someone; their friends or family would have to want to go too. One person even mentioned that some events should be dog friendly. White British people and students were especially concerned about not being able to come without their friends, but it would seem that Reading on Thames Festival is not yet established on the student radar.

There were a couple of people mentioning that they would no longer be in Reading when the next festival came around.

4. The programme

Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of interest in a series of potential programme events. The options differed between those answering the online survey and those answering the (shorter) paper survey. Treating these two questionnaires separately, the responses people gave, now placed in average order of interest, are listed below.

Online questionnaire

If you had the opportunity in 2019, how interested would you be in the following events/activities?	not interested	depends	interested
1. Food events	10.2%	25.0%	64.8%
2. Music events	11.7%	24.2%	64.1%
3. Watching performances (drama, dance, circus)	10.4%	28.8%	60.8%
4. Visiting places of interest or of natural beauty	12.7%	33.3%	54.0%
5. Film screenings	13.7%	37.1%	49.2%
6. Heritage or history focussed events	15.1%	34.9%	50.0%
7. Art installations/exhibitions	16.5%	33.1%	50.4%
8. Comedy shows	20.8%	25.0%	54.2%
9. Fetes with stalls, games, side-shows, rides, food etc.	23.1%	28.1%	48.8%
10. Walking tours	28.5%	31.7%	39.8%
11. Hands-on art or craft events	31.5%	32.3%	36.2%
12. Debates and discussions	32.0%	35.2%	32.8%
13. Volunteering for the 2019 Reading on Thames Festival	40.8%	42.4%	16.8%
14. Making food	47.6%	32.3%	20.2%

15. Spectating at sports events	50.0%	28.3%	21.7%
16. Having the opportunity to perform yourself (dance, music, drama etc.)	72.6%	16.1%	11.3%
17. Sports activities	69.7%	22.1%	8.2%

Paper questionnaire

If you had the opportunity in 2019, how interested would you be in the following events/activities?	not interested	depends	interested
1. Attending performances involving music, drama, dance, circus, comedy or film	8.9%	17.8%	73.3%
2. Viewing art and exhibitions or visiting places of interest or of natural beauty	20.2%	11.2%	68.5%
3. Events involving stalls, games, rides, food or sport	31.4%	8.1%	60.5%
4. Attending debates, discussions, tours or heritage and history focussed events	30.3%	12.4%	57.3%
5. Hands-on art, craft or food-making events	32.6%	15.7%	51.7%
6. Performing yourself or volunteering behind the scenes	52.8%	11.2%	36.0%

1. In terms of the overall interest, food, music and performance-based programmes are clear favourites, with only a small minority having no interest in attending. Comedy shows were less popular than other kinds of performance, but still favoured by a majority. People liked the idea of events involving food, but much fewer were interested in *making* food.
2. A strong majority of people are also interested in visiting beautiful and interesting places, or looking at interesting exhibitions.
3. Fayre style events with lots of different things to look at and do are also popular with a majority of persons. Likewise, film screenings, and heritage or history focussed events. ‘Talks,’ (for example about local history), captured higher ratings than debates and discussions.
4. Walking tours and hands-on art or craft events were next in line with about a third of persons not interested, a third saying it ‘depends’ a third expressing clear interest.
5. Performing yourself or volunteering behind the scenes is clearly not going to be for everybody, and yet only around half of the respondents completely counted themselves out. This suggests that there is considerable potential to draw people in to making this festival happen and to ensuring that it really belongs to Reading’s people.
6. A majority of people were against the idea of having sporting activities as part of Reading on Thames Festival.

4.1 Who wants what

The attraction of different events by demographic group:

- **Students vs. residents:** Students (who tend to be less engaged with Reading’s cultural scene) showed more interest in food and sports-related events than did residents of Reading. They were keener on music events than on other kinds of performances (such as drama and dance), whilst residents (particularly older residents) rather leaned towards other kinds of

performances. Students were less interested in local history, art installations, walking tours and hand-on craft events than were the longer-term residents of Reading (it was the longer-term residents of Reading who were particularly interested in celebrating Reading's unique identity). Their interest in fete type events, in film and in performing or volunteering was similar to that of residents.

- **People interested in the festival and in similar events vs. those who were not:** Those who had been engaged in art and cultural activities in the last 12 months (and those most interested in attending the festival) tended to be keener than the disengaged on watching drama and dance performances, attending art exhibitions, going on walking tours, attending talks and discussions, or engaging in art and craft activities themselves. The disengaged were particularly attracted by the idea of food based and fete-style events (stalls, games, rides, side-shows (and people who wanted to go Reading Thames Festival were happy with fete-style events too)). Disengaged persons were also as comfortable as the art-savvy with music, film and comedy.
- **Women vs. men:** Women seemed to be keener on viewing art and on the hands-on craft and food-making activities than men. Otherwise, the suggested events seemed to appeal equally to men and women.
- **Young vs. older:** The events on offer seemed to have general appeal to both the young and old. Younger people tend to be somewhat less interested in passively spectating at performances or talks, although they like music and comedy and are especially interested in the hands-on stuff.
- **Ethnic minorities vs. white British:** Ethnic minorities were at least as interested in all of the events on offer as the white British population. A possible exception is somewhat less interest in heritage and history focussed events compared to whit-Brits, although walking tours were still highly rated.
- **People concerned with the cost vs. those who are not:** Most of the listed events were found to be attractive to people concerned about money as well as to those who were not, although whether cost-conscious persons actually come may be affected by ticket prices. The exception was history and heritage related talks and debates. These type of events were appealing rather to the better off and the higher qualified.

The attraction of different demographic groups by event (and events ordered by overall popularity):

- **Food events.** Food is especially appealing to students and to people who do not usually take part in art, culture and heritage-related events.
- **Performances (music, drama, dance, circus, comedy):** All popular, although students, younger people, and people not already into cultural activities somewhat favour the music events. Having said that, *people who said it was likely they would come to the festival were rather drawn by the non-music performances than the music performances.* They were interested in drama, dance, circus and local history. Although music is generally popular, it would seem that the appeal of *this* festival is celebrating Reading in ways that enlarge on the music events currently on offer. Comedy is the least preferred of the group, but appeals particularly to the younger generation.
- **Visiting places of interest or of natural beauty:** Of great importance and all demographic groups equally interested.

- **Film:** All demographic groups that could be monitored in this survey were equally interested.
- **Heritage or history focussed events, tours and debates:** Local history and heritage holds more appeal to residents (over students), to people who are already engaged in cultural activities, to older people, to White British (over ethnic minorities), to higher qualified people and to the least cost-conscious (the better off?). Although popular with the majority of interviewees and especially with those interested in attending a Reading themed programme such as Reading on Thames Festival, such events will have to be carefully planned and marketed in order to appeal beyond their niche audience. For example, some people commented that instead of talking about 'art culture and heritage,' the festival should be marketed as a fun day out. Likewise, walking tours held more appeal to ethnic minorities than straight history talks. Debates were less popular than talks or tours.
- **Art installations/exhibitions:** Art is another subject which appeals particularly to those who are already art and culture savvy. Women tended to be more interested in art installations and exhibitions than men. Students expressed less interest than residents.
- **Fetes with stalls, games, side-shows, rides etc.:** Although nearly a quarter of those interviewed were not interested in fete type events, a majority find them appealing and the appeal is similar for all demographic groups, even for those who do not usually attend cultural activities.
- **Hands-on art, craft and food making:** The hands-on events were more appealing to women than to men, but otherwise, had broad appeal across all the different demographic groups. A third of those interviewed were not interested however.
- **Performing and volunteering:** Although only a minority were willing to volunteer or perform, there was no one demographic group more interested than another. Interest and support can be drawn from all.
- **Sport related activities:** More appealing to students or to people who do not much like where they live than to others. Otherwise, the majority were not interested.

4.2 A summary of the free comments on the programme:

- Many respondents commented that what was on offer sounded 'fun,' 'good' or 'interesting', although one person commented on last year saying, "Certain things in the programme were fantastic, others were terrible and poorly attended. It feels like the festival has no idea what people in Reading want to see."
- The idea of celebrating the *local* art, culture and heritage scene was well received. The opportunity to learn new things (for example about local history) was appreciated. "Reading needs to look after both its obvious attractions and its more hidden treasures." Regarding supporting local talent vs popular names, more people said they were interested in local talent (The Reading focus is very important and people didn't just want to replicate Reading Festival, although some were interested in big names). People felt that the festival should get lots of local people involved – *but not at the expense of quality*. Although quality is an issue, the question is not good quality or local. As one person pointed out, "some of our local talent *are* popular names, they're big names." There is a lot of excellent local talent to draw on. Much less interest was expressed in debates and issues outside of local interest for this festival. A strong majority of people wanted this festival to showcase local artists and

community initiatives. There were mentions of the importance of supporting/profiling community activities that carry on around the year, and helping people to connect (connect with one another, and also to become aware of and connect into local services that they can benefit from).

- Many liked the idea of consistently revolving everything around the river Thames and see the Thames as a key asset to Reading.

One person commented on last year, “I love some of the events you have brought to Reading but I have no idea what you’re celebrating. To gain a loyal audience you need a better identity.”

People wanted something new and distinct from the existing cultural offer (Reading Festival, Readipop, The Children’s Festival). Ensuring events are relevant to the river theme was seen as a positive way forward.

- It was suggested that if local performers were used, this would attract a wider number of locals to attend.
- Performance quality was a key issue gaining multiple mentions. It was also mentioned that the festival itself needs to be well organised, and the venues matter. Quality was seen to be more important than quantity. This needs to be an event Reading can be proud of.
- Food matters. Refreshments (using local providers) need to be accessible.
- There were multiple mentions of ensuring that the festival is ‘green’ (not damaging to nature), is celebrating our natural environment, and is actively promoting protection of the environment.
- The importance of ensuring that the programme contains plenty of variety/choice was also frequently mentioned. Indeed, tastes varied widely even amongst these respondents.

Suggested programme items included:

- Big outdoor events, like street or river pageant style events. “A big river-based carnival regatta. Maybe a big Water Music on a barge?” Uniqueness and creativity are in order. Boat and water-related events were well received. One said, “the swim around Fry Island would be great to see again.” Having fireworks was mentioned, as well as light installations and other immersive events.
- Dance, arts, performances, music, films, art, including art in open spaces, making food, history, stalls, activities, workshops were all mentioned again. Having interactive events was mentioned frequently.
- Pottery throwing, petanque, archery, fire-eating and other acts could go well as part of a fete-style event. Also bookstalls. Opportunities for different people to showcase their talents and interests was seen to be important. Showcasing local talent (on stage and on side stalls) was also seen to be potentially inspirational to Reading’s young people coming up.
- There were comments about the history of Reading being ok but some also wanted some laid back events; fun stuff.
- Events that include people of all ages (child friendly) was considered to be very important.
- There was concern for the programme to be inclusive - representative of Reading’s diverse community. A multi-cultural flavour was especially requested – celebrating Reading’s cultural diversity and history.
- There was concern expressed for ‘wholesome events’ (promoting good morals).

- There were some specialist interests depending on the person talked to. e.g. LGBTQ friendly events, Christian events, debates on the protection of the local environment, or using the arts to promote understanding of green issues. Also highlighting women’s issues.
- Suggested venues included
 - River
 - Abbey ruins
 - Broad street
 - Forbury
 - Christchurch meadow
 - Rising sun, museums, South Street
 - Open houses. Schools.
 - Spreading events across town in suburbs like Woodley, Tilehurst, Earley, East Reading etc.
- Price matters, and having a variety of events means a variety of prices such that everyone can access something good.

5. Publicity

Now ordered by popularity, the following table records how people said they find out about activities and events that are going on in Reading (for example, creative, music, sporting or seasonal events).

Source of information	Popularity
Word of mouth	74%
Social media	71%
Fliers or posters	45%
Online search	42%
Through a community organisation I am part of	27%
In press	18%
Through the school	17%
Local radio	16%
Through my workplace	15%

Word of mouth (74%): People talking to one another is still the most important way for information to get around. Since we tend to have most contact with other people like ourselves, this means that people disconnected from the art and cultural events currently on offer have little chance of even hearing about them. Indeed, there was specific mention of the fact that people some people only got their information from friends who had connections or jobs in the art and culture scene. Ethnic minorities were more likely than White British to rely on word of mouth for their information.

Social media (71%): Facebook was far and away the most important source of social media information. Twitter was mentioned next. Community emails/ email signups had some impact and Instagram had just 4 mentions. Although some people were signed up to centralised sources of information/notifications (such as Get Reading, Reading Arts, Reading Chronicle, Explore Reading,

Reading What's On, Reading Freegle, Round & About magazine, Whitley Pump, Wokingham news, Reading Borough Council and Reading on Thames notifications) or else were signed up to specific art groups or cultural centres they like, many more people mentioned the fact that if they were interested in an event, they would forward the information to their friends, or else would receive information forwarded by friends. White British were more likely than ethnic minorities to rely on social media.

Fliers and posters (45%): People mentioned seeing posters on buses, at bus stops, across the town centre, in parks and on local notice boards. Posters or fliers are also seen in the library, on campus, in museums, in the Town Hall, at the Hexagon and in supermarkets, local shops, cafes, pubs and restaurants. A few mentioned fliers through the letterbox. One person felt that the main roads into Reading should all have hoarding about what is on that day. Posters and fliers are especially important to older people.

Online search (42%): Online searches were especially made for events people had heard something about when they wanted to find out more. Media that is mentioned under 'press' is often accessed online ('Get Reading' for example). There were mentions of looking things up in response to marketing notifications, and also mentions of happening across event information when searching for something related or when browsing. People might also go directly to a webpage for information (such as wherecanwego.com or one of the centralised sources mentioned under 'social media').

Community organisations (27%): Community organisations are an important source of information, and especially to older people. Churches, creative groups, support groups, libraries, museums, political parties and other community groups were all mentioned. Groups that people had signed up to get news from also sent out information.

Through schools (17%) or workplaces (15%) (27% combined): Less important than links to community organisations but still important, the campus, workplace or a child's school are places where people gather and network and are therefore significant sources of information. Schools are often a place to reach people who have no other point of access. For example, people with cost worries were more likely to access information via schools.

In press (18%): 'Get Reading' received the most mentions, but not everyone looked here. Other local newsletters and news websites (either on paper or online) are exemplified under 'social media'. Meridian News, Primary times and Midweek were also mentioned.

Local radio: (for example, Radio Berkshire). The least important source of information but still significant for 16% of those interviewed. More so for the residents of Berkshire who had passed their mid-thirties and for men.

A couple of persons mentioned that we need a tourist information office in Reading! It was also mentioned that the problem with the press, radio and online websites is that they can only advertise the information that they are fed, making it impossible to get the whole picture of what is going on in Reading from one source. People have to search out information and few make the effort. Lucky persons are those who happen to know someone who *does* make the effort, whilst those without connections to someone in the art and culture 'loop' often miss what is going on.

Even amongst those who might see a poster or flier, there is little interest to attend unless friends are talking about going as well. As one respondent put it, "I think events like this festival ... don't

connect with the black community in Reading. It just doesn't feel like it's for us. You've got to recognise that culture is different from one group to another, how we do stuff, how we approach things." This respondent goes on to talk about using performers who are known to his community in the festival in order to bring in audiences from his demographic group.

17% of respondents ticked one further box labelled, 'I don't know enough about what goes on in Reading.' Interestingly, people who *had heard* of Reading on Thames Festival and who were linked into some of the main channels of communication were more likely to tick this box (indifferent of their personal demographic). It would seem that people who know a bit about what is going on are more aware of what they do *not* know than others. It would seem that the less informed are not even aware that they are missing and of all that Reading has to offer. Those outside of the loop may not even be looking for information.

Looking at the association between having heard of the festival (or taking part in art and cultural activities) and the channels of information a person uses, the most effective channels of communication are, in priority order:

- Local organisations. People who got their information via a local organisation were significantly more likely to have heard of the Reading on Thames Festival than others and they were also significantly more likely to be taking part in art and cultural activities. Local organisations are important channels of information and engagement, but probably also because they represent people who are already 'in the loop'.
- The next most important channels are (together) the internet, local press and social media. These are also, but to a lesser extent, associated with people more engaged with art and cultural activities.
- People were marginally more likely to have heard of the Reading on Thames Festival if they got information by word of mouth, but not quite with statistical significance; people are not yet talking about the festival enough. These people were also not much more likely to engage in art and culture activities than others.
- Getting information from fliers and posters is strongly correlated to people taking part in art and cultural activities, and yet people who got their information in this way had not necessarily heard of the festival more than others. Perhaps not enough advertising has been carried out in this way for the Reading on Thames Festival?
- Those who got information through the radio, through schools and work were less likely to have heard of the festival, either because these channels of publicity have not yet been explored or because the information was ineffectively passed on. People accessing information in this way were neither more nor less likely than others to take part in art and cultural activities.

Ethnic minorities are significantly more likely to depend on word of mouth communications than white-British, whilst white-British are more into social media. Written information, posters and fliers are more important sources of information to older people. The information provided via community organisations is also especially likely to an older age demographic.

Focus group and informal conversations targeting BAME respondents

Alice Mopfu-Coles 2019

Although BAME were targeted for this report, the informal conversations also included other races.

Conversations were held at the following venues:

- International women's day – Ibis Hotel, Oxford Road -approximately 40 women
- Diversity day – British legion – Tilehurst – approximately 15 people
- Different Churches in Reading
- Political BAME
- MAPP Reading
- Oak Tree House – Dee Park
- Individuals around Reading
- LGBT
- RISC
- BAME communities

Knowledge of the Reading on Thames Festival

- Most people spoken to did not know about this Festival. They thought that 'Reading on Thames Festival' was 'Reading Festival.'
- Of the 3 people who had had heard about the festival, sources of information were an advert in a bus to High Wycombe, and emails from the Reading Borough Council.

Attendance

- Most people said they would attend if the festival catered for their interests. Interests included:
 - Cooking
 - Church music
 - Art
 - Dancing
 - Work with the Reading Carnival
 - Working with Moslem Groups
 - Inclusive to the diversity of Reading
 - If they are not looking for only those who are 'experts or good'
- Many people had not attended *any* local festivals except for a few who had attended Reading Festival, Reading Pride and Reading Carnival.
- Involving locals in the organisation of events could be one way of increasing attendance, since people attend events put together by their own communities. Examples of these communities included the church, the Pakistan community, LGBT communities, Barbados Community and Sierra Leone Communities.
- It was suggested that attendance may increase if there is no need for expertise, if it allows ordinary people, if there are no payments or just not expensive.

Publicity

Other suggestions for informing people about the festival included:

- Through the churches forum or faith communities in Reading
- Pamphlets targeting certain communities who are not integrated and older people
- Local communities
- In the bus
- Encourage people from other communities to attend who will then spread it through word of mouth
- Facebook
- University channels
- Cooking forums
- Dancing forums
- Sheltered accommodation information board or manager

Quotes

“I am a trans-sexual and never heard of the Thames Festival, even though I also don’t go to the Reading Pride”

“Alice what about them writing to BAME community groups like ACRE, BAFA, PACC, GLOBE CHURCH, CHURCHES, MOSQUE, ALL FAITH GROUPS, NEPALESE COMMUNITIES ETC”

“If these BAME groups are being communicated with and there’s still limited participation, we need to look at why that is. It’s going to be multi-faceted, for sure. But it’s good question to ask and find out.”

“Its about engaging those who aren’t already involved.”

“The arts are often exclusive and cliquy. If you’re not in the arts scene or connected to certain people, accessing these events isn’t easy. It is no coincidence that participation in the arts by BAME communities is notably poor so it’s a very important question because we won’t get representation in the arts if we don’t have participation and vice versa, which means progress doesn’t happen. This something I’d like to discuss further.”

“They could just google and email like everyone else or go to existing events and promote. Not rocket science. We are talking about a Council reading out to organised community groups here as a start as Reading on Thames is a Council Project.”

“I know it was on last September – didn’t go for the and no idea if they targeted BAME. As one of the organisers of a Festival. I know about this.”

“Have their reached out to the Reading Carnival organizers or the Reading Pride?”

“We are Caribbean, and we were born here and as for myself I am a woman artist, I draw all these and never heard of this Festival”

“Is it for white people only or those that are good in everything”

“We have an after-school club for young people and we have never heard of it and again nobody has ever approached us sadly.”

“I am over 21 years and lived in Reading all my life and never head of this particular festival”

"I am 82 and came like most of the Windrush people and we have the Barbados community and never heard of this."

"I am a carer work with older people – anyone in this room ever heard of the Reading festival?"
People in the room responded that they had never heard of it.

"I am a cook here and would like to hear more so that I can cook Jamaican food at the festival."

"Please let us know what action you are going to do with the survey?"

"People at ROSE have never heard of this and I have never, and I am involved in a lots of community groups"

"Reading is diverse, where do they get those that perform, we are here, we have young grandchildren who can sing."

Conclusion

From the conversations it did seem like the Reading on Thames Festival was known to many people living in Reading. Although the people talked to were from diverse communities including young people (above 18 years), older etc, most of them from BAME groups and individuals, they had not heard of the Thames Festival.

How should we best market the Reading on Thames festival to you?

- Social media 6
(Mostly online platforms e.g. snapchat)
- Posters/leaflets 6
- Come in to school and tell us 3
- Adverts 1

Where do you go to find out what's going on?

- From school 8
- School websites 5
- Social media 3
- Word of mouth 2

What would make you go to the Reading on Thames festival?

- Music (mostly rock/metal bands) 5
- If new experiences on offer 5
- Cost (preferably free) 3
- Food (preferably free) 3
- If my friends go 1
- Having more information 1
- Harry Styles 1

What a 'festival' means to me

- Music 8
- Lots of activities/entertainments 5
- Creativity/something different 3
- Taster sessions 1
- Food 1
- Games 1
- A parade 1
- Fun 1
- Sales 1
- Concerts 1.

Respondents were asked if they would like to volunteer to help with a future Reading on Thames festival.

Nine of the 12 students attending offered to be a volunteer – names are available via the facilitator with school approval. One was a maybe and two declined.

Conclusions

- None of the respondents had heard of the Reading on Thames festival
- Art is mainly about self-expression and culture mostly about how you live in a country or community
- Art (mostly) and culture is important to the respondents (11 of 12 agreed)
- Both are important because they enjoy art as an expressive medium and culture shows who you are
- Social media and posters/leaflets were considered the best marketing channels but visiting schools and informing students about the festival also important.
- Overwhelmingly, the school is the location (including its websites and friends) for finding out what's going on

- 7 A festival means mostly music with lots of activities or entertainments and something different.
- Three quarters of the JMA students offered to act as volunteers – may be helpful to make prompt decisions about this offer and get back to the interested people.

Focus group with young professionals

John Ord 2019

This report presents the findings and conclusions from the focus group for younger professionals aged between 18 and 45 working in Reading. This focus group was held on Tuesday 19th March.

Sixteen people from 8 companies attended the one hour focus group at the White Building in Kings Rd between 6.15 and 7.15 pm – they responded to an invitation that emphasised the wish of the Festival team to ‘..know more about the kind of events you enjoy going to and how you tend to hear about them.’

The focus group programme included a registration process, completion of a Consent Form, allocation to one of two work groups (dictated by the limits of space in the two rooms allocated for the event) and an introduction to the method and content of the focus group activities. This latter involved tackling 6 actions either individually, in pairs or small group discussion.

1. Participants

Respondent's companies

Barton Willmore (4); Haslams (1); James Cowper Kreston (3); PBA (1); Primark (1); PWC (4); Shoosmiths LLP (1); SSE (1)

Gender

11 female; 5 Male

Age

Range 21 – 32.

21 (2), 22 (2), 23 (4), 24 (1), 26 (1), 27 (3), 28 (1), 30 (1), 32 (1). 21 to 24 - 9 and 26 to 32 - 7

2. Findings

Action 1. Discussion

2.1 Asked about their **motivation to attend the focus group** respondents provided a range of incentives:

- Through workplace recommendations 3
- To learn more about Reading on Thames festival 3
- Interested in the focus group exercise 3
- Because friends were attending 2
- Chance to meet other professionals 2
- What's available for my age group 2
- Learn more about Reading scene 2
- Easy £20 2

2.2 **Festival go-er**; eleven of the 16 respondents classed themselves as occasional festival go-ers, 2 were regulars and 3 non-attenders

2.3. **Awareness of Reading on Thames festival** – 15 of the 16 respondents were not aware of this festival.

2.4 **Attendance at any Reading festival** in past years – 7 of the 16 respondents had attended Reading festivals in previous years.

Asked to **name the local festivals** they attended they replied as follows: Reading Festival 7, Pride 2 Readipop 1, Beer festival 1.

2.5 How **best to be informed** about forthcoming festival events – people replied as follows:

- Social media 16
- Banners/posters/billboards 3
- Word of mouth 2
- Street flyers 1

Interestingly, of the 16 social media responses the great majority mentioned email (12) and Facebook (4)

Action 2 Photo scrutiny – deconstructing typical festival scenes

Respondents were asked to select at least one of 6 mixed festival scenes and pick out key words and positive or negative aspects:

2.6 Key conclusions:

- Summer events best in evening sessions with good supply of drinks and food and emphasis on groups of friends with plenty of opportunities for socialising
- Big crowds must be well managed with due regard to all health and safety matters
- If family based lots of facilities and activities for children and places to relax and rest
- Beware if family based or too mixed by age - younger people may find this boring
- Food supplied must be of good quality, not too expensive and of mixed cuisines/different cultures but try to avoid over-queueing and lack of seating
- Provision of food must be a good opportunity for local businesses
- Young people want good music and loud with an opportunity for dancing – emphasis on fun
- But please avoid overcrowding – danger of crushing
- If it's about beer it's about men, especially older men but bingeing must be controlled. Plenty of seating and trying new beers helps
- Younger people prefer night time events, driven by good music, a range of entertainments and space for dancing.

Action 3. Art, culture and the Reading scene. Respondents views on what these terms mean and how they see the Reading arts and culture scene

2.7 What 'art' means

Overwhelmingly, **art** was seen as forms of expression (painting, writing, sculpture, fashion etc) or as a vehicle for emotional or inspirational ideas; it makes you feel something. It's about reflectiveness and self-expression and placing meaning on the world.

2.8 What 'culture' means

Culture was represented mostly as how people live –whether by place, origin, dress or music. There was an emphasis on what people have in common such as where they live, their traditions and what they share – their identity.

2.9 Reading's art and culture scene

Respondents were very forthcoming about **Reading's art and culture scene** – while there is a great variety of people in Reading they were perceived by focus group respondents as mostly in younger age groups, especially students. Generally, the local scene was lacklustre evidenced in rather bland museum and theatres – good for young age groups 16 to 22 and older 50+ adults but little in between. There are history places – the Abbey site and Reading Gaol but often seen as 'British' – and not for them.

Reading Festival was seen as the standout and dominating event with little to match it. There is little cultural diversity and no vibrant or notable art scene e.g. exhibitions or galleries. Much more could be offered all year round.

The eating scene is good but young professionals wanted more events for their age group and more ways of connecting with others and there are no comedy nights.

2.10 What's missing?

Again, a productive response as follows:

- More hustle and bustle needed with something that makes Reading unique – having a stand-out identity; otherwise just looks like anywhere else in the south east.
- More independent events or activities are needed – functions, festivals, one-offs and pop-ups.
- There are too many chain shops and more art shops, bars and cafes are needed
- There is no big music venue or centre for cultural exhibitions, galleries, live music and workshops and there's a lack of international spirit – the place is too white British; more ethnic mixing and celebration needed.
- Reading has little that is new and it has several run-down areas that need cleaning and more greenery – respondents were not specific about these areas.
- It's not a helpful place for visitors and there's a need for more street signs illustrating the town's history e.g. around the Oracle area.
- There should be more for young professionals to enable networking and connections – maybe modelled on Shoreditch and 'Can we please have a comedy club?'

2.11 Reading as a place to live and work

Most respondents liked the town as a place to work – it's an accessible place, with good transport, plenty of job opportunities, lots of shops that meet a range of needs and there are many young people about.

It is also a safe environment – friendly if a bit dull and sleepy. Reading is functional but not pretty, practical if not imaginative, diverse but a lot more could be done. It does not have a great reputation

and there are some 'dodgy' places (not specified) and a lack of greenery; nice place to work if not to live. *"Very enjoyable place to work but you couldn't pay me to live here though"*

For the young professionals, parking was expensive and house prices high but has easy access to London

ACTION 4. Key function groups

Respondents were asked to imagine priorities from 4 festival perspectives – organisers, artistes, punters and site operatives.

2.12. Sponsors/organisers – responses in order of priority included:

- A cost-effective event with effective advertising, a good attendance and with a profitable outcome - also well planned and organised
- Providing an enjoyable and a popular and memorable experience – catering fully for the target demographic with the right performers in a safe and welcoming environment
- The location(s) was right, cost was not prohibitive and there was sufficient investment in infrastructure such as welfare blocks – it should be innovative.

2.13. Artistes – the public performers, artists, groups, entertainers. Responses included:

- They were expected to have real impact and maximise their performance, enjoy themselves and gain a sense of achievement and satisfaction - in effect make their name. They should please their fans and make new fans and also widely raise awareness of their achievements
- Humility and dedication count and capacity to interact with their audience and they should be popular in their demographic and give some sense of where they are going – what cause are they for and they should not take safety risks
- They should turn up.

2.14. Punters – those who turn up to the event

- Overwhelmingly, they want to have fun and be entertained with the best performers with a variety of performers or events. There should be a diversity of food and drink 'Not just burgers'.
- It's important they have a chance to give feedback and expect it to be acted on. The whole event must be safe and secure and clean – especially clean toilets.
- Other priorities included sleeping options, plenty of seats, good social media connectivity, value for money and a good range of facilities. People should also be encouraged or incentivised to spread the word.

2.15 Site operatives – those responsible for on-site security and arrangements

- Most responses here focused, as might be expected, on health and safety and security matters with every effort made to ensure no drugs or under-age drinking and no riots or mosh-pits.
- The event or performances should be smooth running, well –co-ordinated to ensure people's wellbeing and staff should be well-trained and have good knowledge of the site facilities and events.

- They should always be available , polite and responsible and helpful – ‘Invisible but event must run smoothly’

ACTION 5. Two questions invited post-it responses throughout the session – here are the questions and responses:

Q1. The 3 most important things that appeal to me about a festival are:

- Location 8
 - Music 7
 - Food 7
 - Cost 6
 - Quality/range of entertainment 5
 - Going with friends 2
- Other single mentions included: drink, type of people going, connectivity and known artists

Q2. The events I most enjoy going to:

- Rock/pop festivals (e.g. Reading Festival) 6
- Food festivals (e.g. Cheeseifest) 6
- Beer festivals 5
- Cultural/social events (e.g. Pride) 3
- Motor sport/air shows 2
- Comedy shows 2

ACTION 6 Image analysis – range of images to focus on with the following question:

What creative activities or entertainments would you like to see in our next Reading on Thames festival programme - which are most engaging and why?

Nine numbered photos showed a wide range of activities – here are results for those seen as most engaging:



Photo 1 2



Photo 2 2



Photo 3 3



Photo 7 1



Photo 4 3



Photo 8 2



Photo 5 1



Photo 9 6



Photo 6 6

All of the pictures attracted some interest and respondents suggested a very wide range of engagement from painting workshops, to limbo contests, to food sampling, to stand-up comedy and a party boat with music and alcohol.

Some key elements include:

- Emphasis on something different, something innovative.
- Physical activities such as dancing
- Events that are educational, interactive and immersive
- Activities that are performance or show/exhibition based – art galleries, theatre, photography, concerts
- Throughout, provision of good food and drink

PRIMARY CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions presented here derive only from the contributions of the 16 self-selecting respondents attending the focus group – they may or may not represent the views of this wider demographic.

1. Awareness of the Reading on Thames festival is extremely low
2. About half of the respondents had attended Reading festivals in previous years
3. Overwhelmingly, social media was considered the best informing channel, mostly email or Facebook
4. Art is seen as creative expression (in many forms e.g. sculpture, writing, painting etc) conveying emotions or as a reflective means of placing meaning on the world
5. Culture is seen as the way people live and what they share – notably a sense of identity.
6. Reading's art and culture scene was regarded as somewhat lacklustre – best for younger age groups (16 to 22) or older (50+) age groups. Reading Festival was the standout event.
7. What's missing is a livelier scene especially for young professionals who wanted a big concert venue, galleries, a variety of events including comedy and workshops, good food/drink and more creative or innovative programmes 'something unique'
8. Reading was seen as a better place to work rather than live – it's a safe place if a little sleepy.
9. Most important elements for festival activities included location, music, food and cost.
- 10 Respondents most enjoyed going to rock/pop events and food festivals.
11. There was an evident need for events or programmes that were different or innovative – something active/interactive, immersive, engaging and educational.

APPENDIX 1 – Demographic information

Demographic information about persons interviewed for this survey
226 responses (131 online and 95 on paper)

Question	possible responses	%
Had you heard of the Reading on Thames Festival before taking part in this survey?	0=No 1=Yes	48.42 51.58
(If heard of the festival) Have you attended any Reading on Thames Festival events in the past?	0=No 1=Yes	53.10 46.90
Would you attend/attend again?	1=Unlikely 2=Depends 3=Likely	5.83 42.60 51.57
Did you take part in any art, culture or heritage-related activity (events similar to those described in this survey) in the last 6 months?	0=no 1=yes	44.84 55.16
How big a part does cost play in your decision making?	1=Cost plays a minor role compared to quality 2=Cost plays an important role 3=I am only likely to attend the free events	37.79 53.46 8.75
What is your gender?	1=male 2=female prefer to self-identify/ left blank 0=male or female 1=self-identify/blank	28.04 71.96 95.56 4.44
What is your age range?	1=18-19 2=20-24 3=25-29 4=30-34 5=35-39 6=40-44 7=45-49 8=50-54 9=55-59 10=60-64 11=65-69 12=70+	3.60 12.61 5.41 9.91 13.51 8.11 13.96 9.46 9.46 9.01 2.25 2.70
How would you describe your ethnic origin?	White British Other White Black or Black British Asian or Asian British Chinese Mixed heritage or other	70.37 4.17 13.89 5.56 0.93 5.09
What is the first half of your postcode? (e.g. RG2, RG30)	Central=RG1 North=RG4 East=RG5/6 South=RG2 West=RG30/31 RG postcodes outside town non-RG postcodes	23.70 8.53 11.85 22.75 20.38 7.58 5.69
Which of the following best describes your status in Reading?	Resident Student Visitor/other (e.g. raised in Reading) Commuter	77.52 12.84 5.05 5.05
"I like living where I live." Do you disagree or agree with this statement?	1=strongly disagree 2=disagree	1.83 1.83

	3=neither disagree nor agree 4=agree 5=strongly agree	19.63 47.95 28.77
Paper survey only:		
Highest qualification	1=none 2=secondary school or college 3=degree or above	4.49 55.06 40.45
Do you care for children?		50.00
Do you have a paid job?		82.61
Does poor health or disability limit your day-to-day activities?		7.78

APPENDIX 2 - Questions used in the survey

Note: These are the questions from the paper survey. The online survey differed in layout. Also the event options (Q3) were divided into many more sub-categories (see Section 4). The online survey did not include questions about qualifications, childcare, having a job or health.

1. Had you heard of the Reading on Thames Festival before taking part in this survey?

- No
- Yes. If yes: Did you attend any of the events?
 - No
 - Yes

The Reading on Thames Festival is a celebration of Reading's people, history and landscapes and is funded by the Great Places, Reading Borough Council and Reading UK. Last year's festival included events that took place indoors, as well as in parks and on Reading's streets. The programme included live music, circus, dance, films, creative activities, food, walking and guided tours. Local and national artists were both involved

2. Does this sound like something you would be likely to attend (or attend again) in 2019?

- unlikely
- depends
- likely

Please can you tell us what influences your decision?

3. If you had the opportunity in 2019, how interested would you be in the following? (please tick or fill in)

	Not interested	Depends - What does it depend on? e.g. Cost? Location? Child-friendly? Who performs? Support offered to potential performers? Disabled access? Friends?	Interested
Attending performances involving music, drama, dance, circus, comedy or film			
Attending debates, discussions, tours, or heritage and history focussed events			

Events involving stalls, games, rides, food or sport			
Viewing art and exhibitions or visiting places of interest or of natural beauty			
Hands-on art, craft or food-making events			
Performing yourself or volunteering behind the scenes			
Other events or activities you are interested in:			

4. Did you take part in any art, culture or heritage-related activity (events similar to those described in this survey) in the last 6 months?

- no
- yes

5. Do you prefer outdoor or indoor events?

- indoor
- outdoor
- I like both

6. How big a part does 'cost' play in your decision making?

- Cost plays a minor role compared to quality
- Cost plays an important role
- I am only likely to attend the free events

7. How do you find out about activities and events that are going on in Reading (for example, creative, music, sporting or seasonal events)? Please give as much detail as possible. e.g. *which* newspaper or website. (Tick all that apply):

- Online search. Which websites? ...
- Social media. Which channels? ...
- Word-of-mouth
- Fliers or posters. Where? ...
- In press – which publication? ...
- Local radio
- Through the school
- Through my workplace
- Through a community organisation I am part of
- Other ...
- I don't know enough about what goes on in Reading

8. About you (please circle or fill in):

Gender: Male / Female

Age range: 18-19; 20-24; 25-29; 30-34; 35-39; 40-44; 45-49; 50-54; 55-59; 60-64; 65-69; 70+

The first half of your postcode (e.g. RG2, RG30) ...

Ethnicity: White / Mixed / Black or Black British / Asian or Asian British / Chinese / Other...

Which best describes your status in Reading? Resident / Student / Visitor / Commuter / Other

Highest qualification: none / secondary school or college / degree or above

Do you care for children? no / yes

Do you have a paid job? no / yes

Does poor health or disability limit your day-to-day activities? no / yes

9. "I like living where I live." Do you disagree or agree with this statement?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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10. Any further comments, questions or suggestions?