

EDI  
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# SCIENCE FESTIVAL

2025



**SPACESHIP EARTH**

Impact Report

# We are Edinburgh Science

Edinburgh Science is an educational charity dedicated to making STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) accessible, memorable, and empowering for everyone. We bring this mission to life through the Edinburgh Science Festival – a city-wide celebration that showcases the best scientific and creative talent. Through inspiring events and experiences, we engage audiences of all ages and highlight the powerful role science plays in our everyday lives.

*"It was brilliant and a great opportunity for the general public to engage with scientific research."*

**FAMELAB UK: SCOTTISH FINALS ATTENDEE**

*"I love April because of the Science Festival!"*

**PLANETARIUM LATES: YOU ARE HERE ATTENDEE**





# A Stellar First Year

In my first Edinburgh Science Festival as Director and CEO, we explored *Spaceship Earth* – a recognition that Earth is not an infinite resource but a shared vessel carrying us through the cosmos. Through the lenses of sustainability, space exploration and biodiversity, our 2025 programme explored how science can empower us to build a just and regenerative future. At the heart of the Festival was a bold line-up of scientists, explorers, and creative thinkers, sparking curiosity through big ideas, lively discussions, hands-on activities and inspiring performances.

A standout highlight was our interactive exhibition in the Grand Gallery of the National Museum of Scotland. Blending science fact and fiction, we explored whether space travel could inspire climate solutions here on Earth. In partnership with the Edinburgh International Book Festival, artists, writers, and student designers brought the theme to life through original stories, illustrations and a striking costume showcase.

We also introduced *DiscoveryLab* – our reimagined family experience at City Art Centre – designed to spark curiosity through hands-on, playful science and create lasting memories for families to enjoy together.

This remarkable year was made possible by the generosity of our supporters, Catalysts and patrons. Your trust continues to fuel our mission: to make STEM accessible, memorable, and empowering for all. Thank you for being part of this journey.



**Hassun El-Zafar**

Director and CEO of Edinburgh Science



# Festival in Numbers

# 110,447

**FESTIVAL ATTENDEES**

# 29

**VENUES**

# 18,531

**TICKETS SOLD**

# 92

**TEMPORARY  
STAFF EMPLOYED**

# 117

**EVENTS**



## Spaceship Earth

Our interactive exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland explored how space technology can contribute to more sustainable living on Earth.

# 53,296

**VISITORS**

# 76

**CONTRIBUTING  
CREATIVES**



## DiscoveryLab

Our pop-up science centre for children age 5–11, where science meets play. Families explored five floors of hands-on science activities they could enjoy together.

# 10,317

**VISITORS**

# 16

**ACTIVITIES**





## Big ideas

Exploring the science shaping our society with talks and discussion events for adults.

**5,249**  
VISITORS

**58**  
EVENTS

**87**

**SPEAKERS, HOSTS  
AND PRESENTERS**

## Science for all

We are committed to breaking down barriers to STEM – whether facing systemic or financial obstacles, we want to ensure everyone can explore the wonders of science.

**872**  
**SCHOOL CHILDREN  
ATTENDED FROM 16  
DIFFERENT SCHOOLS**

**54%**  
**FEMALE AND  
NON-BINARY  
SPEAKERS**



**84%** **AUDIENCE  
ATTENDED  
FREE EVENTS**

**7** **BSL INTERPRETED  
EVENTS**

**10** **COMMUNITY  
GROUPS**



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

# To increase science capital among our audiences.

Everything we do at Edinburgh Science is designed to build our audiences' science capital, whether that's by sparking an initial interest, deepening existing knowledge, inspiring conversations or demonstrating that science is for everyone. Through engaging hands-on experiences, we inspire curiosity, showcase future opportunities and promote a science-literate society – supporting positive change while making science fun and accessible to visitors of all ages.

A survey of our Festival audiences found that 55% of adult visitors and 58% of children had medium or low science capital – demonstrating that we're successfully reaching audiences who don't have a strong pre-existing background in science. 93% of adults and 91% of children agreed with the following statements about their visit, which indicate we're helping to build their science capital – "I felt like this event was a place for me," "this visit made me want to explore some of the things covered" and "we talked about the content of the event together."

## Programme highlights

This year we launched *DiscoveryLab* – a reimagining of our flagship family experience, where young people get to enjoy immersive, science-themed environments, with story-led activities and thematic zones exploring real-life situations. Over the years these experiences have become a hallmark of the Edinburgh Science Festival, offering memorable and engaging ways to inspire young minds and help them understand scientific concepts.

For young people to continue building their science capital beyond the Festival, it's important that parents also see the value of science. To engage adults, we adapted existing content and created new activities that the whole family could explore together.

Our programme of explosive shows brought an inter-generational audience to the Festival, with families enjoying a range of science themes in events such as *The Ultimate Bubble Show*, *From Bake Off to Blast Off* and *The Rocket Show*. A highlight of the programme was *Walk Like an Astronaut* with oceanographer and NASA astronaut Kathy Sullivan, who answered audience questions about her experience exploring both space and the depths of the ocean.

## What is science capital?

Science capital is the sum of all science-related knowledge, attitudes, experiences and connections that an individual builds up through their lives.

Research shows that the more science capital a person builds, the more likely they are to see themselves as a "science person" and continue with post-16 science.



## Key metrics

**117**  
**EVENTS**

**29**  
**VENUES**

*"This visit has really sparked one of the grandchildren in particular – so glad we were able to allow her this experience, as we had no idea of her love for this. Thank you."*

**BEACH EXPLORERS ATTENDEE**



**OVER**  
**110,000**  
**PEOPLE ATTENDING**  
**OUR FESTIVAL**

**BUILDING ON THE**  
**SCIENCE CAPITAL**  
**OF OVER 90%**  
**OF OUR AUDIENCE**

*"My daughter thoroughly enjoyed the Splat-tastic workshop and immediately tried to teach her little sister as soon as we got home. She was talking about it all day and was even muttering about it under her breath as she fell asleep"*

**DISCOVERYLAB**  
**ATTENDEE**





## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

To champion accessible and equitable participation in science, particularly with underserved audiences.

It is vital that the science shaping our society is accessible to all, so that no matter your background, everyone feels empowered to engage with STEM. Women, minority ethnic groups and people of lower socio-economic backgrounds remain underrepresented in STEM and related careers, and as a Festival we're committed to breaking down these barriers.

### Free events

We recognise that financial barriers can limit participation, so with the support of our funding partners we delivered 35 events that were free to access, resulting in 84% of our total Festival visitors attending at no cost.

As in previous years, we invited schools based in the most deprived areas according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to visit *DiscoveryLab*. We welcomed 872 pupils from 16 schools across Edinburgh and the Lothians for an exclusive free visit before opening to the public. We also invited local community groups to *DiscoveryLab* and some of our family shows, enabling 268 individuals from 10 groups across the city to access the Festival without barriers.

### Inclusion

*DiscoveryLab* is an exciting and busy experience which can be overwhelming for some visitors, particularly those with autism or other sensory needs. To help support their visit, we provide a Quiet Space where people can take a break from the action and offer ear defenders and sensory backpacks that are available free of charge.

We included BSL interpretation alongside some of our key adult and family events, including *The Genetic Book of the Dead* with Richard Dawkins, *Less* with Patrick Grant and *The Rocket Show*. To further strengthen our commitment to accessibility, we partnered with local organisation Birds of Paradise to incorporate Disability Equality Training into our dedicated science communicator training programme.





## Key metrics



*"Extremely accessible! We have both physical and mental disabilities in our families and have been impressed over the years at how both have been accommodated for, it's been a huge relief."*

**DISCOVERYLAB ATTENDEE**

**92,775**  
**VISITORS**  
**ATTENDED**  
**FOR FREE**

**872**  
**PUPILS**  
**FROM 16 SCHOOLS**  
**(75% FROM**  
**SIMD1 AND 2)**

**54%**  
**FEMALE/NONBINARY**  
**SPEAKERS**



*"We are a working-class family from Leith with my children attending Leith Academy and I love that [my daughter's] experience has created a belief that she could achieve an offer from a university like St Andrews."*

**SEVEN DEADLY SINS ATTENDEE**

**268**  
**COMMUNITY MEMBERS**  
**ACROSS 10 COMMUNITY**  
**GROUPS FROM ACROSS**  
**EDINBURGH**

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

To foster public dialogue and engagement, highlighting the global impact of science and creativity.

Climate change, public health, resource scarcity – STEM is key to understanding and combatting these urgent issues facing our planet, and our programme of adult events aims to bring these ideas to life.

We offer our audiences the opportunity to hear from the researchers and scientists who are working at the cutting-edge of STEM. Our 2025 line-up featured **Prof Richard Dawkins**, NASA astronaut **Dr Kathy Sullivan**, *The Great British Sewing Bee*'s **Patrick Grant**, sustainability expert **Prof Mike Berners-Lee** and renowned climate scientist **Prof Johan Rockström**.

We showcased emerging technologies and the latest research, from the impact of AI in medical care to the clean energy technologies that can power a cleaner future. **Prof Richard Smith** and **Miss Isabel Quiroga**, the surgeons behind the UK's first successful womb transplant, shared their extraordinary story just days after the resulting birth hit headlines around the world.

We attracted significant media coverage, with features in *The Scotsman*, *The Herald*, *The Times*, *BBC Scotland*, *STV* and *BBC Radio Scotland*.





# Key metrics

**34**  
TALKS AND  
DISCUSSIONS

MARKETING  
ACTIVITY REACH  
**3,105,576**



*"An outstanding opportunity  
to hear directly from one of  
the great minds of the age"*

THE GENETIC BOOK OF THE DEAD  
WITH RICHARD DAWKINS ATTENDEE

PRESS REACH  
**410,352,875**



PRESS  
COVERAGE  
**288**  
PIECES

ORGANIC SOCIAL MEDIA REACH  
**1,636,962**

*"Excellent, well-presented evening with  
a remarkable woman."*

ABOVE AND BELOW: AN ASTRONAUT'S VIEW  
OF OUR PLANET ATTENDEE





## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

To celebrate the intersection of science, art and culture.

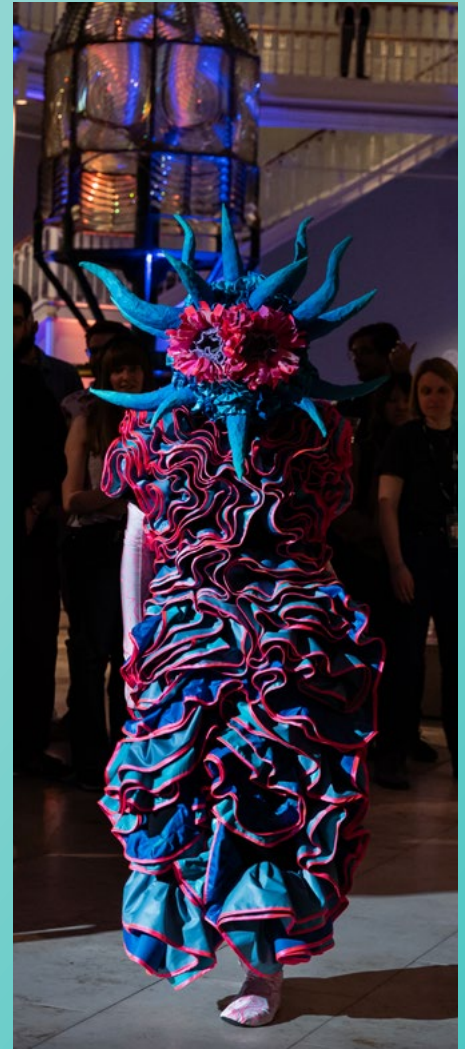
Science extends far beyond the lab or classroom – it's woven into every aspect of our lives. Creativity and curiosity are essential to driving innovation and progress, just as science can spark transformation and inspire artistic expression. This year's programme invited audiences of all ages to explore the intersection of science and art through a diverse range of interactive events and experiences.

### Programme Highlights

Our flagship *Spaceship Earth* exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland brought together academics, scientists, writers, illustrators and members of the public to explore what a future sustainable world might look like. We commissioned new pieces from sci-fi writers **Martin MacInnes**, **L. R. Lam** and **Eris Young**, inspired by discussions with scientists in the field. These were displayed alongside winning entries from our Scotland-wide sci-ku (science haiku) competition, engaging young people from across Scotland – all of which were then illustrated by graphic illustrators from Edinburgh College of Art.

Our *Science Nights Out* events fused science fiction with science fact, with adults-only evenings that allowed adults to learn through play – from slime making to science-themed karaoke! Attendees of *Spaceship Earth* After Hours enjoyed a sustainability-themed costume show from Edinburgh College of Art's costume students and heard directly from Turkish Astronaut **Alper Gazeravci** about his life on the International Space Station.

We showcased multidisciplinary creatives working across artforms, highlighting the intersections of science, art, and culture. In partnership with the Royal Academy of Engineering, we exhibited visual artist **Kelly Anna's** sculptural piece celebrating contemporary female engineer Alice Kan. The *Atmosphere* and *Planetarium Lates* programme of events offered film fans the chance to watch cult classic sci-fi movies inside a planetarium, **Prof Bob Coecke** fused industrial music with quantum physics, and budding artists illustrated Scotland's geology at *The Art of Rocks*.





## Key metrics



**7**  
**SCI-ART**  
**EVENTS**

**600**  
**SCI-KU ENTRIES**

**79**  
**CREATIVES**  
**ENGAGED**

**12**  
**SCIENCE**  
**NIGHTS OUT**



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