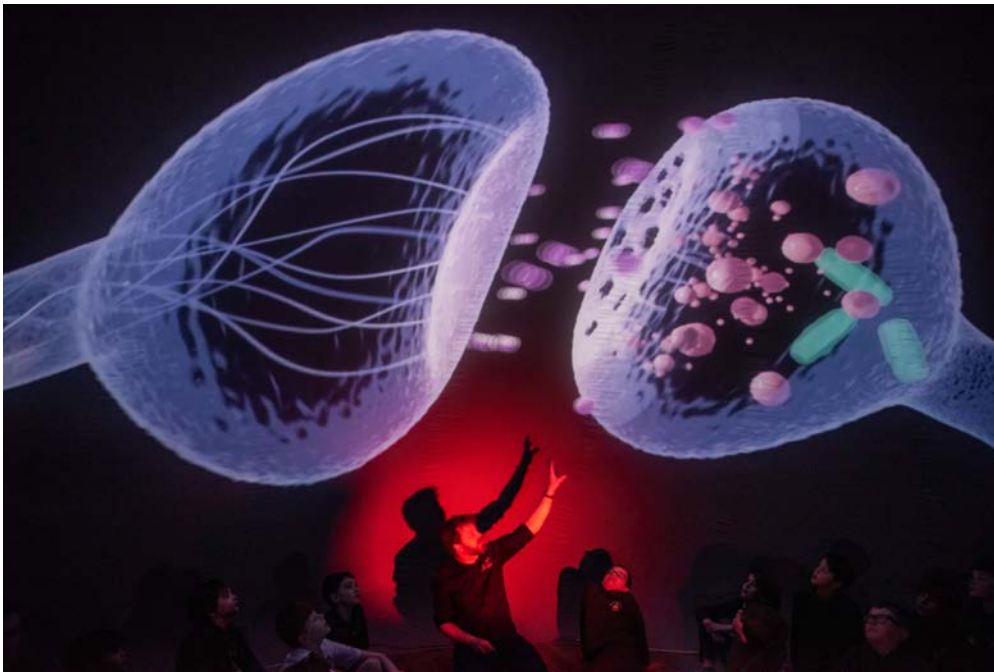




Bristol Neuroscience Festival 2023



Inside the Brain Dome

Feedback Report

BN Steering Committee
8 December 2023

The Bristol Neuroscience Festival is jointly organised by Dr Dave Turk (Psychological Science) and Professor Emma Robinson (PPN). The first BN Festival was run in 2013 with subsequent BN Festivals taking place in 2016 & 2018. The Festival schedule for 2020 was cancelled at short notice due to the global pandemic and subsequent lockdown.

The Festivals each attract more than 4,000 visitors, some of whom travel great distances to attend. It takes place over three days, with the first day open to primary schools, the second day for secondary schools and the final day open to the general public. The event brings together researchers and students from across the Bristol Neuroscience remit (Life Science, Health Science, NHS, Engineering etc) as well as our friends at the Royal West of England Academy who support our Schools and Community Brain Art competition and local charity groups (Glenside Hospital Museum, Bristol Drugs Project, Medical Research Council (MRC) Brain Bank and mental health charity Off the Record). Thanks to a successful funding application to the Alzheimers Research UK Inspire Scheme in 2023, Dr Lindsay Sinclair from the Bristol Medical School worked with Bristol Explorer Dome to create a Brain Dome for the BN Festival (see cover image). This was extremely popular leading to a number of positive feedback responses from visitors (as well as some negative comments for those not able to get access to it!). The Brain Dome appeared at multiple schools and regional events prior to the Festival.

The Festival offers visitors of all ages the chance to talk to our world class scientists and clinicians, undertake hands-on activities, receive careers and admissions advice, take part in experiments and attend our Best of Bristol research talks. The 3-day event closes with a public lecture in the Victoria Rooms. There is an incredible appetite for this Festival in the local area and from wider afield. It has been suggested that the Bristol Neuroscience Festival is the largest in the UK and possibly in the whole of Europe

The 2023 Bristol Neuroscience Festival represented an important milestone for Bristol Neuroscience - our 20th Anniversary. To mark this, we were able to invite Professor David Nutt, Edmund J. Saffra Chair in Neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College, London, and our first invited speaker in 2013, to take part in the Public Lecture on the final day of the Festival alongside Professor Emma Robinson. This event was fully booked several weeks before the Festival started and extremely well received by those in attendance.

There was a Teacher's strike called for the opening day of the Festival and as a result, a number of schools cancelled their booking with us. However, with schools closed, we were able to offer parents the opportunity to bring their children along on the day and this was a resounding success and ensured that attendance was at full capacity.

Evaluation Methods

Post-event questionnaires were completed by 15 school teachers with regard to the 746 pupils they supervised on the day.

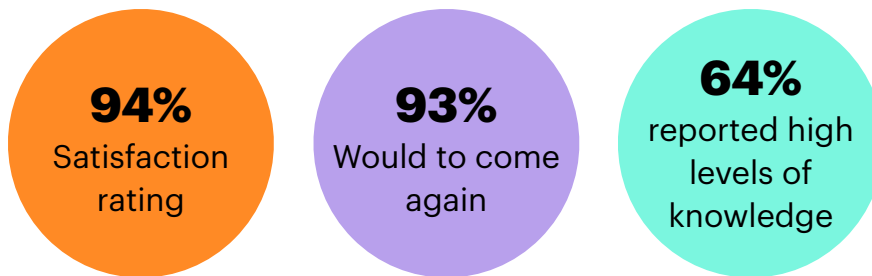
A further 182 responses were completed by pupils attending the secondary school day and 113 people attending the general public day on 4th March. Thus our responses relate to 1041 individuals. This reflected approximately 25% of the total number of people attending the festival.

Bristol Neuroscience Festival 2023 - Feedback Summary

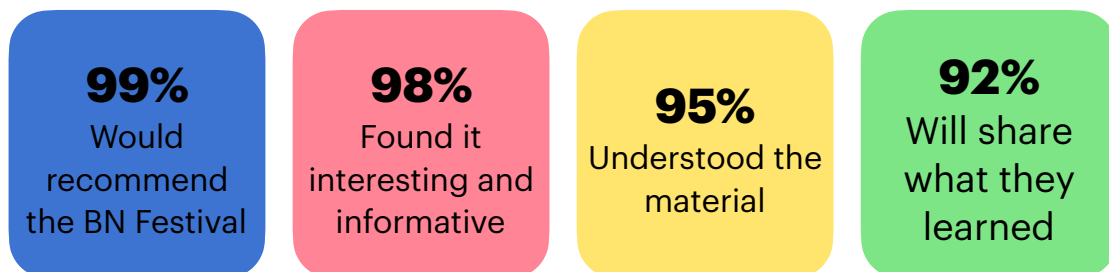
THE NUMBERS



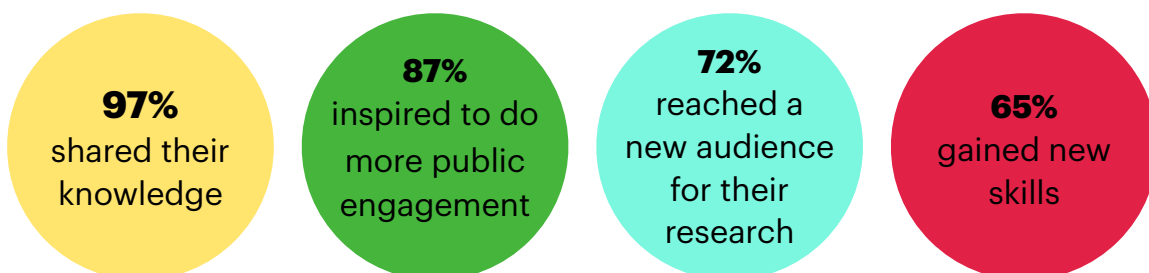
PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS & COLLEGES



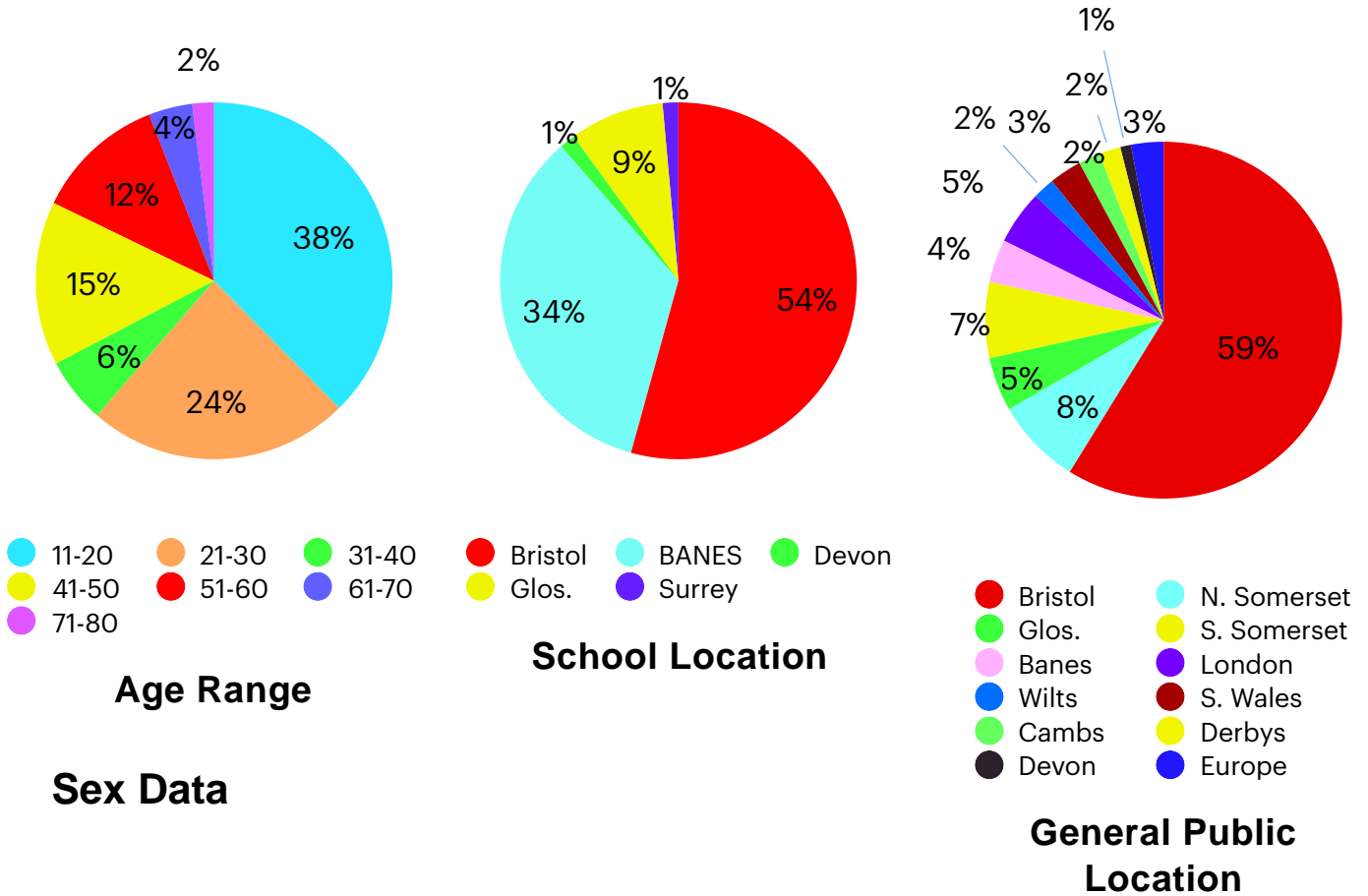
GENERAL PUBLIC



RESEARCHERS & CHARITIES



Feedback Response Demographics



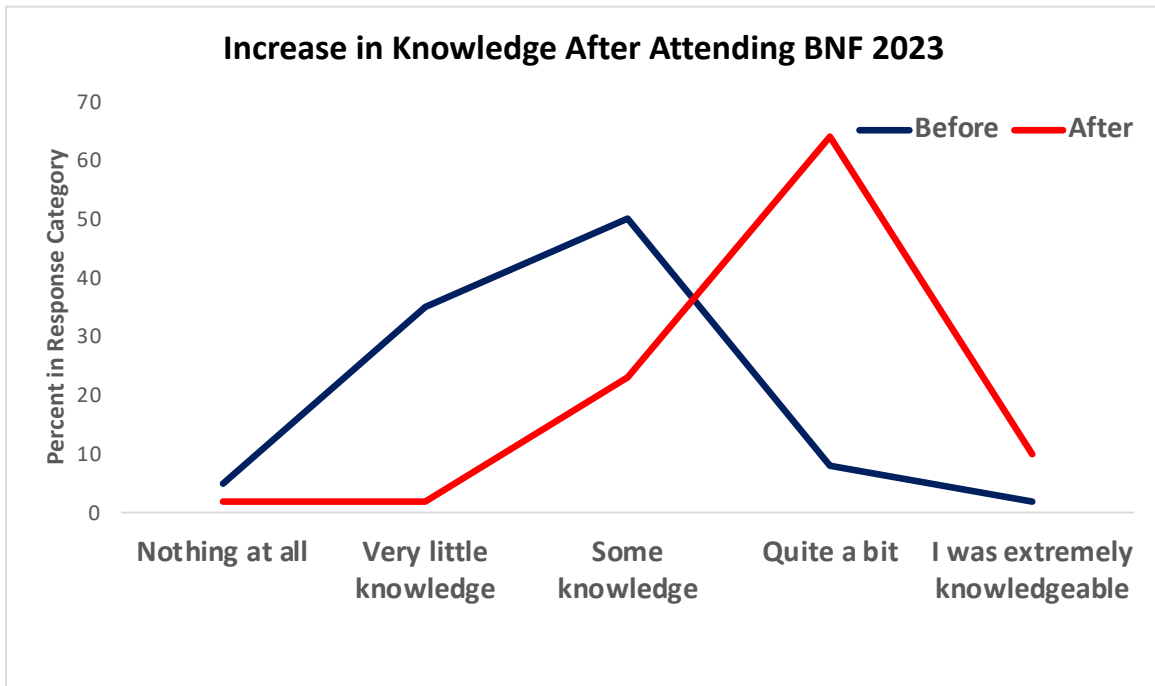
Sex Data

Sex	Schools	Public
% Male	24	29
% Female	73	68
% Other	3	3

Ethnicity Data

Ethnicity	School Pupils	General Public	City of Bristol 2021 Census
% White	69	77	80
% Black	8	3	6
% Asian	14	14	10
% Other	7	6	4

School Pupils



Why did you come to the event?

Response	%
to learn more about neuroscience	65
to meet/talk with a scientist	15
to see what career options there were in neuroscience	19
to find out more about courses at the university	13
Other	1

School Pupils Word Cloud



Agreement with the Following Statements %	School Pupils	General Public
I found the Festival material accessible and understandable	93	95
As a result of coming to the Festival, I am more aware of the benefits of neuroscience to society	93	94
I intend to learn more about neuroscience research	67	81
I am more aware of undergraduate options in neuroscience at UoB	62	N/A
I enjoyed talking with current students and staff from UoB at the festival	94	N/A
I found the festival interesting and informative	94	98
I found the festival engaging and interactive	91	96
I will share my experience with friends/family or at school/college	92	92
I will use the knowledge I gained at the Festival in my work/studies	93	85
The Bristol Neuroscience Festival was relevant to me	93	91

General Public Word Cloud



School Teachers

Statement	% Agreed
As a result of coming to the Festival, I am more aware of the benefits of neuroscience to society.	94
I found the festival interesting and informative	100
I found the Festival material accessible and understandable	100
The festival was relevant to the curriculum	87
I will use the knowledge I gained at the Festival in my school	93
I felt my students learnt useful info about neuroscience	94
I felt my student enjoyed the Festival	100
I would bring my class to future BN Festivals	93

Teacher Comments

"Students left really positive and thoroughly enjoyed the experience"
St Mary Redcliffe School

"Superb set up, brilliant engagement with the students." **Fairfield High**

"We travelled a long way to come to this and it was really worth it. The PhD students really engaged at the right level with the students and answered their questions in an interesting manner that sustained their interest." **Hele's School, Plymouth**

"Fantastic day - students loved it" **Oldfield School, Bath**

My students had a great time - the exhibitors were all really engaging and so positive about their research areas, it has inspired a lot to think about psychology and neuroscience as future careers." **Winterbourne Academy**

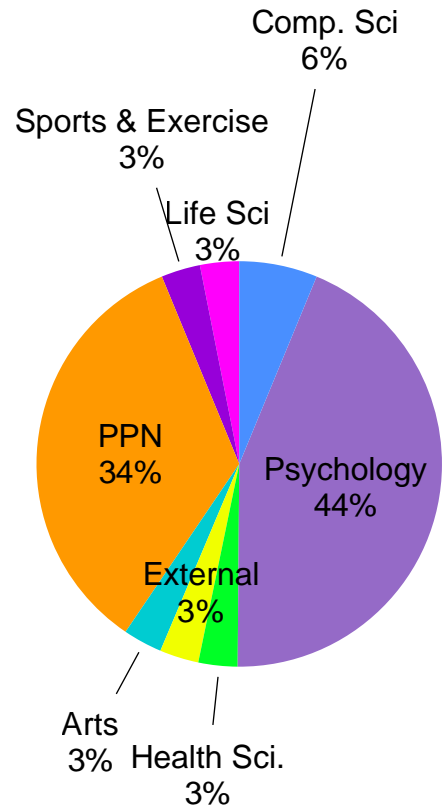
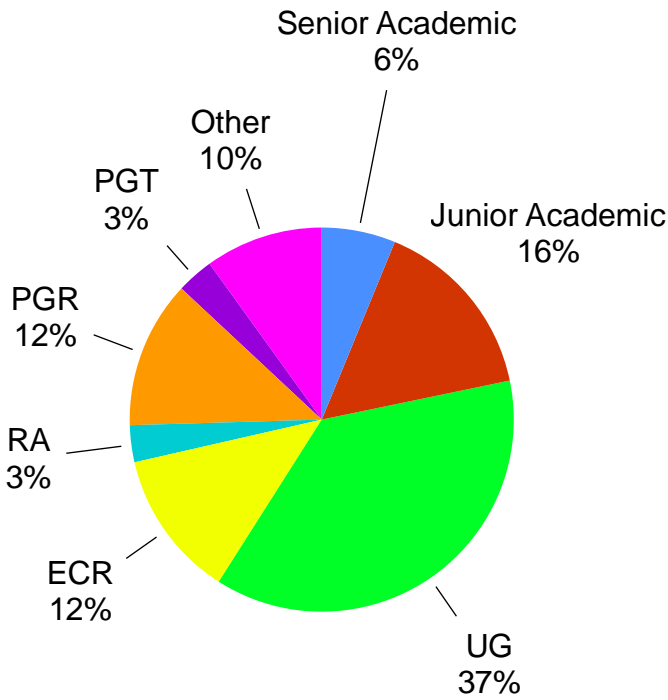
"Our students had an interesting morning and it made them aware of future careers related to neuroscience. It was well organised and easy to navigate the stalls. Lots of interactive stalls." **Montpelier High School**

"The students absolutely loved it. They often find neuroscience challenging, so this trip inspired them and made it more interactive and exciting. We couldn't believe how great the activities were, especially considering this is free! Will definitely look to book again next year." **Montpelier 6th Form**



RESEARCHERS, VOLUNTEERS AND EXTERNAL PROVIDERS

Who Provided Feedback



Exhibitor Word Cloud



Exhibitor Responses

What activities did you support over the Festival period? Percentage of respondents supporting each activity.

Hands-on Activities	General Volunteeri	Exhibitor Role	Knit-a-Neuron	Best of Bristol	Memory Study	Brain Dome
69	41	41	16	6	6	6

Why did you want to take part in the Festival? Percentage of Respondents selecting each response option.

Share My Knowledge	Inspire Visitors	Gain New Skills	Reach New Audience
75	75	53	50

Statement	% Agreed
I was able to share my knowledge with members of the public	97
The event has inspired me to continue with public engagement	87
I was able to reach a new audiences and/or involve the public in my research	72
I gained new skills	66
How interested are you in supporting future Bristol Neuroscience Festivals?	95

Can you tell us what you enjoyed about supporting the Bristol Neuroscience Festival.

“I spoke to someone and helped inform them what it’s like to study at Bristol as they were interested in enrolling next year.”

“The variety of activities and guests, and the enthusiasm of organisers and volunteers”

“I loved explaining neuroscience to kids, it was so rewarding!”

“I enjoyed talking to new people and sharing my knowledge of neuroscience.”

“It was fun! There was a real buzz in the hall. I enjoyed talking to lots of different people about my research.”

“I really enjoyed being able to talk to both school students and the public to share the research which is happening at Bristol.”

"Getting to talk to a range of young people from all backgrounds about science that I would never usually be able to- and hearing their interests."

"The children and the public were very enthusiastic and asked us lots of interesting questions which prompted exciting discussions that made both us (the researchers) and the public think deeply. We also got to have a lot of fun."

"We have attended all the BNFs and they are amazing. The BNF is a great way to link our historical medical and mental health collection with neuroscience and engage with the public as well as giving our volunteers a chance to learn new skills and more about neuroscience."

"All our team had a fantastic time. We were able to engage 650 people in our sleep research. Talk to 700 about their brain and mental health."

"Personally I love learning about what research is being conducted. This year I loved talking with the students about their research and was blown away by the NHS laser treatment, the Neurosurgeon who spoke to me was an inspiration."

It gave me a strong sense of being part of the Bristol Neuroscience community, the venue was nice, the freebies + lectures, it was overall a very professionally organised event (compared to some other public engagement events)."

"It was superbly well organised. Thank you"

"The Brain Art competition was one of the best things I have ever been involved with."

The Future

The 2023 BN Festival was a great success. Thousands of local, and not-so-local people attend representing a major contribution to the University's Civic Engagement Strategy. It is also an excellent opportunity to work with our supported schools and widen participation across age, sex, ethnicity and economic strata. There is also some evidence that university admissions across BN Schools can be positively impacted as a result of pupils attendance at the Festival. We developed some excellent careers resources which have been highlighted by volunteers and visitors alike and have been able to share our World Class research portfolio with a significant number of visitors to the University.

Our researchers and students extol the value of this engagement opportunity. It informs their research and skills development and many exhibitors (and visitors) have already asked us when the next Festival will take place. The University has, in the past, recognised the value of this event with two public engagement awards and we have also received separate commendations from STEM Learning for this work. There is clear value to this activity in terms of our civic duty, WP strategy and admissions as well as to our researchers and students.

Sustainability

The BN Festival has built up a reputation as one of the largest events of its type in Europe. Each BN Festival attracts visitors from across the UK and Europe to the University and we strongly believe that we could deliver another highly successful event in 2025. We have some outstanding staff and students who support this event and all efforts should be made to support this highly important public engagement opportunity going forward.

Having said this, the Festival organisers face recurring barriers each time they attempt to deliver the event around finance and workload. In order to move forward with this event in 2025, sufficient financial and administrative support would need to be put in place by the University by the summer of 2024. The workload burden should not be underestimated. Each year, applying for multiple small amounts of funding to support Festival costs; chairing meetings; providing oversight, scheduling exhibitors, developing the speaker programme; merchandise, volunteer training; equipment hire; advertising and promotion; photography and videography; schools liaison; ticket sales; amongst many other duties.

The funding we seek helps us to provide travel bursaries for schools to attend to reduce financial barriers impacting on our local schools. This is extremely important with respect to both the widening participation agenda and our civic engagement priorities. We also have to seek funding to provide administrative support to the BN Festival. In 2023, for the first time, we were able to engage members of the University Events Team. The two administrators assigned to the BN Festival did an amazing job and significantly reduced the workload of the two seminar leads.

In summary, the BN Festival is a major event which engages with the people of Bristol and beyond. It is supported by academic leads who have amassed great experience in putting on multi-day public engagement events and by a team of staff and students dedicated to making their cutting-edge research available to all. It represents a major component of the University's civic engagement strategy. It is an effective mechanism to widen participation and can have a positive impact on student recruitment in Life and Health Sciences.

What We Need

We need the University to underwrite the costs of the BN Festival and to support us in securing the venue (The Wills Memorial Building) at least one year in advance so that we can plan over a longer period of time. It is extremely challenging to organise an event of this magnitude when current policy only allows us to book teaching spaces in March-April of the same year. What we need to do is secure the Festival venue a year in advance. The financial burden for any future festival will be in the region of £30k, plus dedicated administrative support. The additional benefit of being able to plan the festival over a longer period is that it would enable senior members of the University to attend. We will be discussing this further with the Civil and Public Engagement teams in due course.

Links

BN Website: <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/neuroscience/bnf/2023-event/>

BN Gallery: <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/neuroscience/bnf/2023-event/2023-gallery/>

