

Sidmouth Science Festival Annual report 2025

The purpose of this report is twofold: (1) to give festival sponsors and the public a brief introduction to the Sidmouth Science Festival; and (2) to report on the 2025 festival, giving a sense of its impact and reach.



1. Introduction

The Sidmouth Science Festival has hosted an annual science festival in Sidmouth since 2012 and organises events about science, technology, engineering and mathematical disciplines all the year round in the Sid Valley and East Devon. The Sidmouth Science Festival became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in 2016. The website (www.sidmouthsciencefestival.org) provides full details of the festival programme and other events run by the charity. Sidmouth Science Festival supports the local economy.

1.1 Aims of the CIO

The first aim of the CIO is to inform, inspire, promote and advance the education of the public in science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) disciplines; and show how these disciplines impact on our everyday lives by integrating science, art, music, comedy and drama with stimulating technical events. The second aim is to reach out to all parts of the community, particularly those who would not normally engage with STEM subjects such as the more socially disadvantaged or those less confident with respect to this subject matter. The third aim is to promote STEM subjects as career options for young people.

1.2 Regular events

The annual Sidmouth Science Festival is run by volunteers and takes place over 10 days every October. It is now one of the largest science festivals run by volunteers in the UK. There are two family days: Super Science Saturday in town at the beginning of the festival, and the Norman Lockyer Observatory (NLO) family day at the end of the festival. Talks and guided visits take place throughout the week. People from national and local organisations and businesses donate their time as exhibitors or speakers at the festival. In recent years, feedback has been collected from visitors and all those who play a part in the festival to understand what has gone well, what challenges remain, and how to improve the festival the following year.



The Parish Church on Super Science Saturday

Regular events throughout the year include the monthly Café Scientifique talks at Kennaway House attended, on average, by 50 people. The schools-based programme also runs throughout the year with volunteers organising scientific activities in local schools. Each year, schools participate in an art project with a specific theme, culminating in an exhibition at Kennaway House Art Gallery on Super Science Saturday. This attracts many children who want to show their artwork to family and friends. Schoolchildren from local primary schools also attend the festival to take part in organised activities.

1.3 Festival Sponsors

The role of sponsors is crucial to the success of the Sidmouth Science Festival. The funds they provide cover most of the costs of the annual festival. These costs mainly consist of venue hire, fees of some presenters, marketing and insurance, as all those who run the festival are volunteers. All but the NLO day and the visits are free to visitors, but many make voluntary contributions when attending festival activities. Festival sponsors receive recognition in the marketing and publicity.

2. Report of the 14th Sidmouth Science Festival 2025

A successful 14th Sidmouth Science Festival was delivered by over 100 volunteers between 10-19th October 2025 for about 3000 attendees. There were over 30 exhibitors, over 30 speakers, a multimedia event on marine life communication, a biodiversity day, a visit to the Gorst Energy Biodigester, and the popular Robot workshop. Over 40 national and local organisations took part in the 2025 festival (see table). Festival sponsors donated £10,600 of the £17,000 it cost to put on the festival (see sponsor logos).

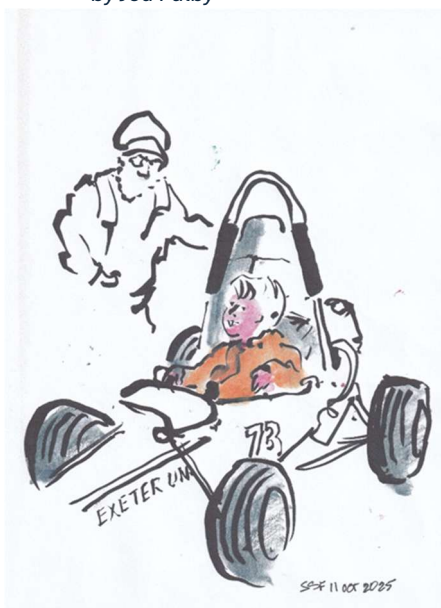
This year, there was a focus on the collaboration between art and science in a well-attended talk on Leonardo da Vinci, and through the work of two local artists who brought the events to life visually and made the festival even more engaging for families and younger audiences. The full programme of events with photographs and artistic sketches, and a summary presentation of the highlights of the 2025 festival, are on the website. All volunteers were briefed on our new safeguarding policy which can also be found on the website.

*Drawing during Super Science Saturday
by Jed Falby*

2.1 Festival family days 2025

Both Super Science Saturday and the NLO day continue to be very popular, both have a great atmosphere and received excellent feedback from those who took part and from visitors. On Super Science Saturday, 2,503 attendees were recorded across the five Sidmouth town centre venues, and the weather was kind. Around 250 people attended the NLO day despite the atrocious weather, and 166 signed up for the robot workshop. Most children attending were of primary school age. Teenagers from local secondary schools, scouts and guides, and university students ran or volunteered on many of the exhibits.

On Super Science Saturday, exhibitors included representation from universities (Exeter and Plymouth), colleges and local schools, and professional institutions. The geology venue featured a series of short talks, and a range of geology exhibits to handle and explore. For families with children the STEM based 'Make and Take' activities proved to be extremely popular, as was the 'Invertebrate Zoo' organised by the University of Plymouth where insects and other invertebrates could be seen and handled. New exhibitors included nurses from Exeter University's Biomedical Centre, with a stand about grip strength and models of human organs and cells, and Exeter University's 'Formula Student' racing car.



The NLO family day was larger than previous years and planned to appeal to youngsters of all ages. The most popular activity was the Space Detectives Virtual Reality adventure. Devon Science added a popular show 'Alien Slime' to their 'Adventures in the Science Lab' and 'Rocket Building and Launching'. For very young children, activities included "Make your own Constellation" and "Meet the Artist". New this year was a display entitled "The Life of a NASA/ESA Astrophysicist", compiled by an Astro-Scout in the NLO's youth programme. Three of the NLO speakers this year were part of the NLO's Astro-Scout programme, two of whom went on to study science at Cambridge, and the third recently completed her Master's degree in Natural Science at Durham University. Our aim was to highlight the positive effect that the NLO and the Science Festival has had on the youth of Sidmouth. The programme of planetarium shows was tailored, for the first time, for specific age groups. Sessions covered: (1) the night sky aimed at older children and families with an interest in

Astronomy and Science; (2) mythology and stories about the night sky with "Story Telling Under the Stars"; and (3) "Astronomy for Kids" for very young children and their families.

Feedback from visitors attending family days showed that 96% rated them great (79%) or quite good (17%) on a 5-point scale; the word cloud shows the words most used by these visitors to describe the festival: fun, great, excited and interesting featured highly (see figure). Feedback from exhibitors, presenters and volunteers showed that overall, on 5-point scales, 95% found the



experience of family days very enjoyable (60%) or enjoyable (35%); and 90% described the festival organisation as very efficient (58%) or efficient (32%). In a third of feedback from visitors, and in half the feedback from exhibitors, presenters or volunteers, suggestions were made for the 2026 festival, and these are being reviewed by the festival team.

2.3 Schools programme in 2024-2025

Schools' Art in Kennaway House

Volunteers ran scientific activities and workshops in three schools during 2024-2025 and attended the Dorchester Science Festival. In addition, 477 pupils from three schools attended a variety of activities during the 2025 festival week with help from East Devon Countryside Rangers, The Sid River Catchment Group, Sidmouth Arboretum and Kings College London. This year's hexagon art project had an underwater theme and involved 11 schools as well as home-educated children for the first time. More than 1650 hexagons were made, grouped together by school, and displayed at Kennaway House Art Gallery during the 2025 festival. One senior teacher noted how pupils *"all the way from nursery to Year 6 love the hands-on learning experiences, whether these be bug hunting, kick sampling or learning about river management."*



2.4 Talks and visits during the 2025 festival

During the festival over 30 speakers gave talks covering, for example, fungi, landscape recovery, cybersecurity and ageing. Most took place at Kennaway House with a few at other venues. Around 1,150 people attended these talks. Feedback from these visitors showed that 96% rated them as great (82%) or quite good (14%) on a 5-point scale; the remaining 4% were rated as 'so-so' and none were rated 'not so good' or 'not for me'. Visitor comments underlined the interest in the talks and other events, as did the word cloud based on three words that visitors used to describe the festival, with interesting, informative and excellent being used most frequently (see figure). Asked what would make the festival better, visitors mentioned improvements to the audiovisual systems; new topics for 2026, and improved advertising and signposting; these are being reviewed by the team.

2.4 Marketing and publicity

The 2025 marketing plan focused on increasing awareness of the festival and individual events across a wide audience in East Devon, Exeter and beyond. Activity was coordinated across digital channels, print media, public relations and partnerships, with the festival website acting as the central hub for event information, bookings, news updates and sponsor recognition. Social media activity was sustained throughout the year, with increased posting during the lead-up to the festival, helping to maintain visibility and engagement. Efforts to grow the volunteer team were supported

We acknowledge the generous support from our sponsors



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Further details and most up to date information can be found on the
website: <https://www.sidmouthsciencefestival.org/>