Report from Levitation (Eastercon 2024)

Every Eastercon is different. 2024 was held in a convention centre which brought with it new challenges. We hope that others will consider the Telford convention centre in the future, and with that in mind we have tried to address specific issues as well as general ones in this report.

One warning which we are adding here is our conclusion: Levitation made a loss because of a combination of the cost of living crisis, competing with a Worldcon, and inflation hitting our estimates very hard. But that we would only have broken even, or even still made a loss, at the target 770 members is something that future conventions will have to take on board. Rising expectations at a time when money is short is creating an unsustainable model.

Contents

Accounts

Income

		Current	To date	
1	Membership	£54,459.00	£54,459.00	£0.00
2	At con (Art show, dealers' room)	£1,845.95	£1,845.95	£0.00
3	Pass along	£38,171.67	£38,171.67	£0.00
4	Sales	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
5	Advertising	£190.00	£190.00	£0.00
6	Access Donations	£3,726.70	£3,726.70	£0.00
	Total Income	**£98,393.32**	**£98,393.32**	**£0.00**

Expenditure

		Current	To date	
A	Facilities	£44,502.00	£44,502.00	£0.00
B	Guests (Travel, subsistence)	£6,816.42	£6,816.42	£0.00
C	Publications (printing, posting)	£834.64	£834.64	£0.00
D	Promotions	£1,342.85	£1,342.85	£0.00
E	Tech	£18,611.13	£18,611.13	£0.00
F	Green Room	£1,617.83	£1,617.83	£0.00
G	Gopher Hole	£0.00		£0.00
H	Volunteers	£3,400.00	£2,697.41	£702.59
I	Beer Bar	£0.00		£0.00
J	Ops	£233.51	£233.51	£0.00
K	Registration	£143.68	£143.68	£0.00
L	Art Shows & Logistics	£1,694.52	£1,694.52	£0.00
M	Programme	£196.30	£196.30	£0.00
N	Creche (provider + room)	£2,448.90	£2,448.90	£0.00
O	Newsletter	£36.44	£36.44	£0.00

Expenditure (cont.)

		Current	To date	
P	Committee	£6,500.14	£6,500.14	£0.00
Q	Finance	£2,113.04	£2,113.04	£0.00
R	Insurance	£0.00		£0.00
S	Accessibility	£1,785.60	£1,785.60	£0.00
T	Inclusion	£3,533.84	£3,533.84	£0.00
U	Virtual	£45.99	£45.99	£0.00
	Total Expenditure	**£95,856.83**	**£95,154.24**	**£702.59**

Nett

	Current	To date
Income	£98,393.32	£98,393.32
Expenditure	£95,856.83	£95,154.24
Nett	**£2,536.49**	**£3,239.08**

Art show

Most of the artists emailed directly or artshow@ rather than filling in the Google form. Some did both, which was confusing. It is probably better to use email, and send a form link directly.

There were fewer queries about the no-auction system than last year, and no actual complaints at all.

Do not believe sites that assure you that Heras fencing will go through X entrance, even though you are doubtful! The Heras fencing worked well, but not so well that alternatives aren't being considered.

Communications & social media

Social media went well on the whole but one thing we really cut corners on was alt-text and we would like to have taken a lot more photos. Could have done with more help taking photos, getting them ready for social media and composing alt-text. Tagging dealers, artists and programme participants would also be a lot less work if we collected their social media IDs (or confirmed with them that they don't want to be tagged) when we onboard them.

With more time/more help, social media could also help get shyer members to engage with Discord by starting conversations.

Social media platform	Follower count	Notes
Facebook	456	Reconnect currently has 88 Conversation still has 465
Instagram	211	
Twitter	433	Conversation still has 356
Mastodon	89	
BlueSky	212	

Follower counts for each social media platform

The most engagement from writers was on BlueSky and from volunteers and convention members on Facebook. Instagram and Facebook can be managed together from Meta Business Suite – otherwise it probably wouldn't be worth doing Instagram. I wouldn't bother with Mastodon again, there was very little engagement.

We should have included more detail earlier on about the route round the outside of the International Centre, to help people make an informed decision about which hotel to book. Also for future conventions: if the venue has not been used before the access audit should include getting from the railway station, airport etc to the convention & hotels, again early on for hotel booking purposes.

It would also have been good to get more programme highlights earlier on to encourage people to buy memberships.

Convention space

The venue has three large exhibit halls (that we didn't use), two large suites (of which we used one), two smaller suites (of which we used one) and a considerable number of smaller rooms (all of which we used). It also has plenty of circulation space, some of which can be used for things like food and drink service and social areas. It could have accommodated a much larger convention than we ended up being.

We used the following spaces in the TIC:

Ironbridge 1: Main Programme with circa 400 raked seats, a few floor-level seats for those with mobility issues, a stage and two large screens in 503m^2 of space.

Ironbridge 2: Dealers' Room, 43 dealer tables in 444m^2 of space. One corner was fenced off with pipe and drape for use for childcare.

Ironbridge 3: Art Show, ten panels of Heras fencing with pegboard attached, in 347m^2 of space.

Coalport & Pattingham: Each used as programme rooms with circa 80 seats, theatre-style. 122m^2 for Coalport and 132m^2 for Pattingham.

Gallery: 585m^2 of open space used for food and drink service and a social seating area.

Atcham: Second Programme, laid out cabaret-style with circa 90 seats and nine 5' round tables.

Wenlock 1&2: Green Room, two small rooms combined to give 104m^2 of space containing five 5' round tables with chairs, a control table and a coffee machine.

Wenlock 3&4: Programme room, laid out cabaret-style with four 5' round tables in 104m^2 of space, primarily used for launch parties and workshops, though also for some ordinary panels.

Ryton: Games Room, 53m^2 room with four 5' round tables and chairs.

Beckbury 1&2: Ops Hub, used by the conventions operations team, tech team and volunteers. 104m^2 with a number of trestle tables and chairs that grew steadily as we kept asking for more. You need more tables and chairs in your Ops Hub than you think you do.

Beckbury 3: Newsletter, 52m^2 with four trestle tables and some chairs.

Beckbury 4: Quiet Activity Room, with some jigsaws and Lego on three 5' round tables in a 52m^2 room.

Jackfield Boardroom: Silent room, a "chill-out" room with no noise or electronic devices allowed, in a 60m^2 room with a permanently installed boardroom table.

Heslop/Pritchard: Night-time Games Room, in the Holiday Inn. 75m^2 of space with six 5' round tables. Also used theatre-style for the pre-convention event organised by the British Science Fiction Association on Thursday night.

Concourse: The very spacious ground-floor concourse areas were used for Registration, mobility scooters, and a filking circle. We couldn't plan for this very far in advance, because we didn't necessarily have the exclusive use of the TIC, and if we had been sharing with another event then we wouldn't have had the use of all of the space.

We did not use:

Ludlow suite: A second large suite very similar in size to the Ironbridge suite mentioned above, without the raked seating and with natural light along one wall.

Newport suite: Similar in size to Atcham mentioned above, but divisible into two sections.

Reynolds: In the Holiday Inn, a 180m^2 room divisible into three (Reynolds 1 was booked at very short notice for a semi-private event on Sunday night – see below).

Rathbone: In the Holiday Inn, a boardroom rather smaller than the Jackfield Boardroom mentioned above.

These spaces were largely the right size for their function and worked well, with exceptions noted below. As is always the case, we could have done with a couple more small rooms.

We never needed anything like the full capacity of Ironbridge 1, and had we known well in advance how small we would be, we might have used Newport as our main programme, with two rooms from the Ludlow suite instead of the Ironbridge suite for Dealers and Art Show (since the raked seating wouldn't have been used anyway).

We should have had a full row of seating in Ironbridge 1 in front of the raked seating, for those who couldn't climb up to the raked seats. The TIC did add a few chairs when the problem became apparent.

We had no room available for childcare and very few children signed up, so we located it in a corner of the Dealers' Room in Ironbridge 2, which seems to have worked fine.

The decision to lay Atcham out cabaret-style instead of theatre-style was taken at the last minute, because we had one item that simply wouldn't work theatre-style, but seems to have worked out well.

Wenlock 3&4 was too small for some of the more popular launch events, which should perhaps have been in Atcham, but at the time we scheduled those launches we hadn't yet changed Atcham to cabaret-style seating.

The locations of the volunteer desk and operations help desk in Beckbury 1&2 should have been swapped. Anyone entering the room naturally went to the desk in front of them, which was actually volunteers.

We didn't need both a quiet room and a silent room, and could have used the Jackfield Boardroom for something else – perhaps childcare, or a committee meeting room.

We could have put some items like workshops into the open seating area on the ground-floor concourse, which was barely used.

Key take-away: when booking a convention venue, start small and expand.

Dealers

Our experiment with a dealer price membership which included a table, created problems as some people forgot to fill in the actual dealer form. This should not be repeated.

Discord

We used Discord for live persistent chat before, during and after the convention. Overall the feedback on the Discord was positive.

There were general social spaces, as well as forum threads for each programme item that let on-site and virtual members talk about programme items as they were happening. The programme item discussion threads were the key place that on-site and virtual members interacted with each other on the same level.

53% of members joined the Discord. We used Discord OAuth through our members portal to allow us to link their Discord id with their badge number for our internal records. Some people had issues getting into Discord due to technical hurdles, but overall the solution worked and was less effort than last year, where we had to manually verify who people were.

We had some issues with permissions that enabled who could see what or send messages. Members were very understanding, likely because we responded to issues quickly. In future, create a checklist of things to check before opening the discord – who needs to be able to do what.

87% of messages in the public channels that were open during the convention came from people with attending memberships. Discord is not just a virtual thing, it is heavily used by people on site.

71% of messages in the help channels came from people with attending memberships. People are often favouring a message on Discord over going to the help desk or ops hub. Especially for problems during an item they are watching.

We tried to devolve some of the responsibilities to other areas this year. Ops were in charge of monitoring the help desk. Newsletter were in charge of sending announcements. This did not work well because the area heads did not communicate the new responsibilities to volunteers. Frequent volunteers reasonably assume the role is the same as the previous years they've done it, and need to be informed and reminded of the new responsibilities.

We did some video chats pre-con, which worked okay. But we lacked any scheduled social activities during the convention. We should find virtual volunteers to run parties in the online space, and have a few people seeding conversations in some of the social spaces.

Finance

Bank accounts: Levitation used the Treasurers Account provided by Lloyds Bank originally opened for Mancunicon, Eastercon 2016. A Stripe account was used in association with the registration website and a Zettle account, also opened for Mancunicon, were used for in person sales. The bank account is currently free of charge.

Accounting software: The accounting software used is AceMoney from MechCAD Software LLC – David Cooper has used this software for Interaction, Worldcon 2005 and Mancunicon.

Budget: The original budget was based on costs from Mancunicon adjusted for inflation as well as the quotation for the function space, income was based on curves for Reclamation and later Conversation, adjusted down because of the Worldcon effect. The real problem however, was that we were "on curve" as late as January 2024, and realised that we would not hit our targets too late to enable major changes.

The total number of memberships ended up significantly lower than even our most conservative estimates, and costs were reduced where possible, mainly in programme, and by deciding to print as little as possible. The provision of £26,000 in passalong was insufficient and the convention is currently predicting a significant loss which is being tackled with the support of previous Eastercons (to whom we are very grateful).

In hotels, it is common for the venue hire costs to be reduced in return for guarantees of minimum room-night and food & beverage numbers. This is obviously more difficult when negotiating with a convention centre, but is also a double-edged sword. Our finances could have been even worse if the low numbers had caused us to fail to hit those targets and be stuck with unexpected additional costs.

Groats: Because of the lack of funds the issuing of groats was more tightly controlled by the Treasurer and the Head of Volunteers than perhaps normally the case which assisted in ensuring equitability.

Insurance: Since Mancunicon there are many more providers in the market. Three quotations were received. The convention was covered by Protectivity Insurance, Dovetail House, Wycombe Road, Stokenchurch, Bucks, HP14 3RQ.

Financial summary: Financially, the convention was a disaster, with a total shortfall of around £35,000, which is a little less than the total cost of hiring the TIC for the weekend. This is not the catastrophic problem that it would be for most events, since making money is not one of the purposes of the convention, surplus funds passed along from earlier conventions had covered most of the shortfall before the date of the convention, and we've already had an offer to cover the outstanding amount. But it is of course not sustainable for every Eastercon to have a shortfall of that magnitude.

We were hit by a combination of the World Convention being in Glasgow later in the year, the cost of living crisis meaning that fewer people could afford to attend two (or even one) big conventions in the year, the unfamiliar site some distance from most population centres, the continued fear of contracting Covid at a large social event, the much higher rate of

inflation for hotel and meeting - space costs than is reported in the CPI as a whole, and the need for a higher membership price than usual because of the other factors mentioned above. The TIC was the most expensive venue ever used for an Eastercon, even though it was the cheapest option discovered by the venue-finding service that we used. Had we realised in 2022 that the convention would have been so small, a number of other venues would have been available, but to take them would have meant capping the convention at 500 people.

Green room

In our instructions to panellists we need to allow for the time tech need to mike up participants on the main stage. We should have asked them to come earlier, so they were ready to leave the Green Room ten minutes before the scheduled start.

The virtual guests were able to join in the green room discussions, once we got the hang of the process. We need to have clear written instructions ready for Glasgow. However, Green Room did not really talk to them. We should bring headsets to Glasgow, so we can tell the virtual panellist what is happening even if the room is noisy.

Note that panellists must go to the Green Room because it can leave a virtual panellist stranded if there is no meet up.

Link to Program Ops worked mainly in person - given everything else mainly held together, this coped. But had things started to go wrong it could have been a problem. That needs to work better. Having a voice channel - either radio or a zoom call - to the roving DCM/Duty ProgOps may be necessary.

Having the coffee machine and soft drinks worked well. We served much less beer than usual.

Hall costumes

We got back around 120 out of 900 or so tokens. There is a suggestion that registration should have handed out the tokens not put them in the envelopes where they could be overlooked, especially as we used paper tokens. We should have created a meet up time for photo opportunities, and a photograph board with the Logo would also have been good.

Health protection systems / biosecurity

The convention proved to be a far healthier environment than the hotels used for the previous two years, both of which saw major Covid outbreaks. At the time of writing (four days after the end of the convention), we are not aware of any cases of Covid that were contracted during the event, although our masking policy was similar to the 2023 convention, and less stringent than 2022. Approximately 20% of the convention goers were masked, which was lower than we hoped for.

There are no doubt a number of contributing factors – among them the smaller size of the convention, having the exclusive use of the building, and sheer good luck – but the spacious venue with high ceilings and a good ventilation system that does not recirculate air within the building must have made a significant contribution. But we also had very little "con crud" reported, and this was aided by self imposed social distancing, large spaces, and CO_2 monitoring.

We had CO_2 monitors (kindly provided by Dave Clements) in the Green Room, Ops Hub and bar. The only reading over 1,000ppm (indicating a potential issue with ventilation) was in the Green Room on Friday evening. We told them about this, and it stayed below 1,000ppm for the rest of the convention (though only just below on Sunday night). Neither the bar or Ops Hub ever got above 800ppm.
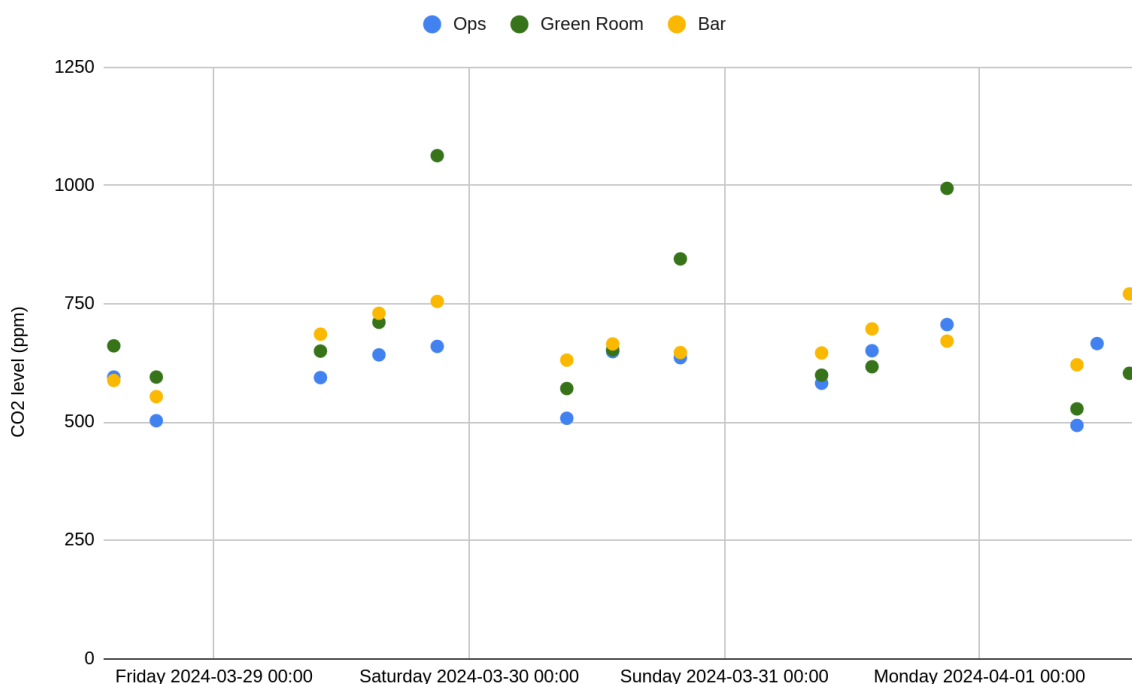
CO_2 readings from the monitors in Ops, Green Room and Bar

Time	Ops (ppm)	Green Room (ppm)	Bar (ppm)
28/03/2024 14:34	595	661	588
28/03/2024 18:34	503	595	554
29/03/2024 10:00	594	650	686
29/03/2024 15:30	642	711	730
29/03/2024 21:00	660	1063	755
30/03/2024 09:11	508	571	631
30/03/2024 13:30	649	653	665
30/03/2024 19:52	636	845	647
31/03/2024 09:09	582	599	646
31/03/2024 13:54	651	617	697
31/03/2024 20:57	706	994	671
01/04/2024 09:11	493	528	621
01/04/2024 11:04	666		
01/04/2024 14:07		603	771

CO2 readings from the monitors in Ops, Green Room and Bar

Saturday AM, Green room informed of the higher reading from the previous evening.

Monday 14:07 no reading available in Ops (early breakdown). An earlier reading was taken from a photo taken by Mike Scott at the indicated time.

Hospitality

Food at the TIC: Generally okay, but some items were a bit pricey and the range not as good as it could have been, especially for those with dietary requirements. The venue could have done better in explaining what they did have, especially vegan options. Service seemed to be generally responsive to demand.

Drink at the TIC: There was a mix of non-alcohol and alcohol, but the low or no-alcohol beers and spirits were very limited (almost non-existent). Venue could improve that enormously. Real ale bar was good and we ran out at a good time given the need to balance members and cost. We had twelve 11-gallon casks of beer plus 100 500ml bottles, making a total of 1,156 pints (with 100 of those "pints" actually being 500ml). That's well below the usual formula of around four pints per attending member, but the convention centre bar was closing at 10:30pm each night (11:30pm on Sunday), so it seemed better to under-estimate. None of it was on sale or return, so we were liable for £6.50 per pint of any unsold beer. Per pint, the real ale was £1 cheaper than last year. Range of beers could be better (the brewery doesn't really do dark ales, stouts, etc). Lack of cider was a problem. In future, we could negotiate from a stronger position about cider and more real ale options.

Drinks for launches and parties at the TIC: TIC provision of an ordering and payment portal to the organisers of these specific events worked well in general. Before the convention, there was a moment of confusion caused by assumptions made that parties would also require food catering - not the case given the nature of the events. Sorted quickly once identified.

Social space at the TIC: Good on the whole. It worked better than we expected, with a good flow of people in and out of the space. A few members expressed they would have preferred more comfortable chairs. The armrests made them particularly uncomfortable for fat people.

Groats: We had arranged for the bar and food service to take our gopher reward tokens (known as groats), but on a couple of occasions staff (including the Duty Manager) seemed not to be aware of this.

Food at the Holiday Inn: Generally okay. Service seemed to be generally responsive to demand.

Drink at the Holiday Inn: Generally good. TIC provided casks of real ale to the hotel bar, which was good. They also responded to requests to slightly improve the range of single malt whisky available. As with the TIC, a relative lack of cider was a problem.

The Hospitality role for Eastercon was new and the initial ideas changed when the venue stated they would do the food (the original plan was something like the food trucks at Conversation; the TIC advised few if any would turn up because of the lack of footfall beyond the convention) and they had a supplier of real ale (Salopian). The TIC also provided furniture for the social spaces, which we initially planned to provide.

Note that in negotiations we used all the arguments we usually do about us knowing our people, and stressed at every point we could about replenishment of real ale (and cider) being a preferred option. We think that from a better negotiating position that could be

possible - including proving to the venue that we have a good idea about how much real ale we drink.

Hotels

We had convention rates in the Holiday Inn and International hotel, but with much less generous cancellation terms than is usual, which caused us a couple of problems. Early bookings were nearly all for the International, which looked much the better option on paper – cheaper, closer to the TIC (by less than 100m), and breakfast was included. However I think some people came to regret it and would book the Holiday Inn next time, since it is a nicer hotel with a restaurant, a wider range of breakfast options, and a health club.

There were some problems and complaints about the extra distance to walk round the TIC when returning from the Holiday Inn to the Travelodge or Premier Inn after the convention centre had closed for the night. That route was also badly lit and rather uneven underfoot, although of course it's a public road so that's not the TIC's direct responsibility. In an ideal world, there would be a well-lit 24-hour walking route past the other side of the convention centre, between it and the town park, fenced off from the car park to keep the convention centre and car park secure overnight.

There were a few complaints about some of the International hotel staff not being as helpful as in the Holiday Inn and the TIC itself. Nothing so severe as to cause us to raise it as an issue, but another reason why more people might go for the Holiday Inn the next time.

The walking (and wheelchair) route from the hotels to the TIC was being resurfaced before and after the convention, and there was some rough unsurfaced ground during the convention itself, though a route had been laid out avoiding the rough areas. That route wasn't very well marked at first, and one member had a fall, but refused help or first aid. The layout was improved after that, but still looked a bit untidy, with tape tied to traffic cones. There were no further incidents that we were aware of.

The mostly-pedestrianised road to the Travelodge and Premier Inn was partially blocked off by Heras fencing during the convention, meaning that the Travelodge's four blue-badge parking spaces couldn't actually be used, and one member in a wheelchair had problems getting themselves and their luggage to the Premier Inn by taxi. As noted above, it was also a steep enough gradient to be difficult in a manual wheelchair. Not the TIC's fault, of course, but something to check for future conventions.

Membership numbers

Full All Days	388
Apocryphal	2
Child	4
Concession All Days	105
Dealers	15
Infant	1
Saturday	13
Sunday	1
Teen	4
Virtual	53
Total	**586**

Breakdown of memberships at March 26th 2024

#	Year	Location	Name	Total # of members
60	2009	Bradford	LX	850
61	2010	Heathrow, London	Odyssey 2010	1300+
62	2011	NEC, Solihull	Illustrious	956 / 877
63	2012	Heathrow, London	Olympus 2012	1400
64	2013	Bradford	EightSquaredCon	800
65	2014	Glasgow	Satellite 4	777
66	2015	Heathrow, London	Dysprosium	1185
67	2016	Manchester	Mancunicon	Unknown
68	2017	NEC, Solihull	Eastercon 2017 / Innominate	Unknown
69	2018	Harrogate	Follycon	949
70	2019	Heathrow, London	Ytterbium	1119
71	2020	(online)	Concentric	846
72	2021	(online)	Confusion	466
73	2022	Heathrow, London	Reclamation	797
74	2023	Birmingham	Conversation	938
75	2024	Telford	Levitation	586

Total membership of previous Eastercons

Member portal

We needed a way to authenticate people before we linked them to RingCentral Events (our platform for streaming and catch-up), as well as a place to initiate the OAuth flow for Discord. This led to us writing a custom members portal.

This became a "one-stop stop" for at-con activities, with a simple flat menu structure that made it easy to find the resources one would need *during* the convention. In the end it had:

- Link to the readme
- Link to the programme guide
- Link to the stream and catch-up
- Link to join the Discord
- The digital copies of the newsletters
- Link to the souvenir book
- Links to the voting forms for the Doc Weir and BSFA
- Link to the collection for venue staff
- Link to the programme participant guides (if they were a programme participant)

A "magic link" was sent out to every member a few days before the convention started. This was unique to their membership and automatically logged them in. The session cookie then lasted for 4 weeks. The link to RingCentral Events also used RingCentral's magic link system. This meant that members didn't have to come up with a password and, for the majority of people, they never had to manually request a login link. People praised this frictionless approach.

The links to the voting forms used a feature in Google Forms to pre-fill their badge number.

As we integrate more and more online features with the convention, even for on-site participants, we are increasingly relying on using people's email addresses as a unique identifier for them. Future conventions may want to consider that, if an email is being provided for someone when they register, that they might want to check it is unique.

Opening hours

Our hire charges included opening from 9am to 11pm on Thursday through Monday, with Thursday being a setup day rather than a public day and charged at a slightly lower rate. Additional hours of opening cost £600 (inc. VAT), and because we were short of money we paid for only one additional hour, extending the closing time to midnight on Sunday. Since the clocks changed on Saturday night, we were concerned that closing at 11pm on Sunday would feel like closing at 10pm.

We advertised the time people needed to be out of the venue, rather than padding it. This did lead to some confrontations with people who assumed we *had* padded it and objected to being asked to leave promptly. On the whole, though, movement to the hotels was relatively seamless.

On Monday, we didn't really need the venue to be open until 11pm, since we were finished with tearing down well before that time.

Two other convention functions typically continue into the night – the Games Room and filk singing. We booked the Heslop/Pritchard room in the Holiday Inn for use as a late-night and overnight Games Room, and this worked well.

Programme

Over a quarter of the members were on programme. A few members said that they would like to have seen more "fun" items in the evening.

The mixture of 45 minute items in 60 minute slots with 60 minute items in 90 minute slots was confusing for some panellists and attendees but allowed us to programme more.

More attention needed to be paid to how many similar items there were, and scheduling similar items against each other. Tagging the items would have made it easier to identify similar items, both to consider dropping ones, and to consider whether or not to schedule them against each other.

Programme participant demographics

These demographics were self-reported by programme participants. The questions were optional. Gender, sexuality and ethnicity were free-form text inputs. In the interests of producing summary statistics, some more nuanced identities have been flattened. If someone is on multiple items, they are counted multiple times.

Gender	Participants		Moderators	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Female	160	27%	41	28%
Male	200	34%	45	30%
Non-binary	57	10%	8	5%
Unreported	177	30%	54	36%

Breakdown of programme participants by gender.

Sexuality	Participants		Moderators	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Asexual	12	2%	5	3%
Bi/pan	95	16%	26	18%
Gay[1]	21	4%	6	4%
Heterosexual	141	24%	32	22%
Queer	38	6%	7	5%
Unreported	287	48%	72	49%

Breakdown of programme participants by sexuality.

[1] *Does not include lesbian.*

Ethnicity	Participants		Moderators	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Australian	2	0%	0	0%
Black	12	2%	1	1%
British	206	35%	52	35%
East Asian	8	1%	2	1%
Irish	4	1%	1	1%
Jewish	20	3%	4	3%
Mixed race	22	4%	5	3%
White	331	56%	73	49%
Unreported	206	35%	58	39%

Breakdown of programme participants by ethnicity.

Where people had multiple identities, they were counted in each of their identities. The percentages are a percentage of participants/moderators, which is why the percentages don't add to 100%.

Age	Participants		Moderators	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
18-24	4	1%	0	0%
25-34	44	7%	7	5%
35-44	85	14%	19	13%
45-54	96	16%	25	17%
55-64	160	27%	41	28%
65+	58	10%	14	9%
Unreported	149	25%	42	28%

Breakdown of programme participants by age.

Programme planning

We used PlanZ as our programme planning tool. A lot of work was needed to make the participant view mobile friendly. More work still would be needed to make it re-usable for other conventions in the future.

Similarly, work would be needed to make the notion of "on site" and "virtual" attendance on a programme item re-usable.

Signage

The Signage on the rooms was very clear. The ability to display on screens worked very well but:

- Get templates / mockups done earlier than you think.
- Ensure the venue can properly display what you're making, and have a plan B.
- Do not rely on the venue having the appropriate staff available on Easter Weekend, or to adhere to the discussed delivery timeline (not their published one).

Streaming and catch-up

We used RingCentral Events as our platform for streaming and catch-up. The cost of RingCentral Events was partly covered by the Glasgow 2024 Worldcon, in exchange for using Eastercon as a testing ground for the platform.

Overall there was positive feedback about the platform.

People found it easy to use. Performance seems good, though it's hard to disentangle video quality and stability issues from tech. A few people report issues with catch-up videos not streaming well.

Live caption quality is okay, and catch-up caption quality is very good.

People very much appreciated the breadth of what was streamed and made available for catch-up.

Chasing people up for permission to stream and catch-up took up some time. In future, we should make it a required question to answer up-front before signing up for the programme.

On-site members appreciated both streaming and catch-up options. Some people watched from their hotel room (when they had adequate wi-fi).

A total of 80 person weeks were spent on the RingCentral Events site (that's about 4 times as long spent online as in-person!)

43.5% of the time someone watched a stream, they watched it all the way through the item.

Room	# People	Total days spent watching live stream
Atcham	82	9.0
Coalport	76	11.6
Ironbridge	99	14.8
Pattingham	84	10.6
Wenlock	54	3.7

Breakdown of how much time was spent watching live-streams of programme items
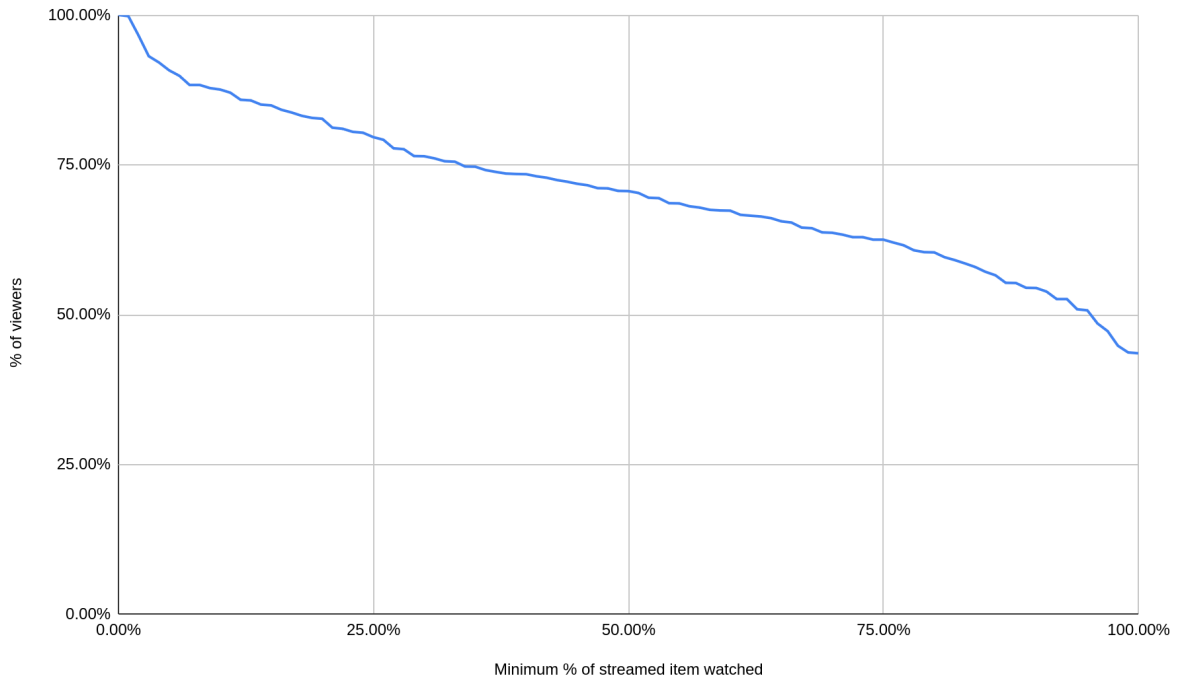
A graph showing how long people watched a live-stream of a programme item for

177 members watched at least one item on catch-up. On average, they watched 6 items.
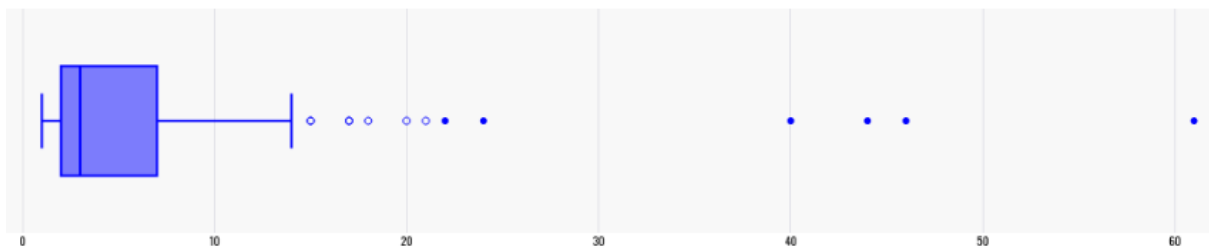
Box plot of how many items a member watched on catch-up (limited to people who watched at least one item)

Despite Ironbridge 1 being the main room, people tended to watch more catch-up items from Attcham, the second programme room. This may be because the items scheduled in Attcham were more appealing, or it may have been because they watched the items in Ironbridge 1 live, and were using catch-up to watch the conflicting items in Attcham.
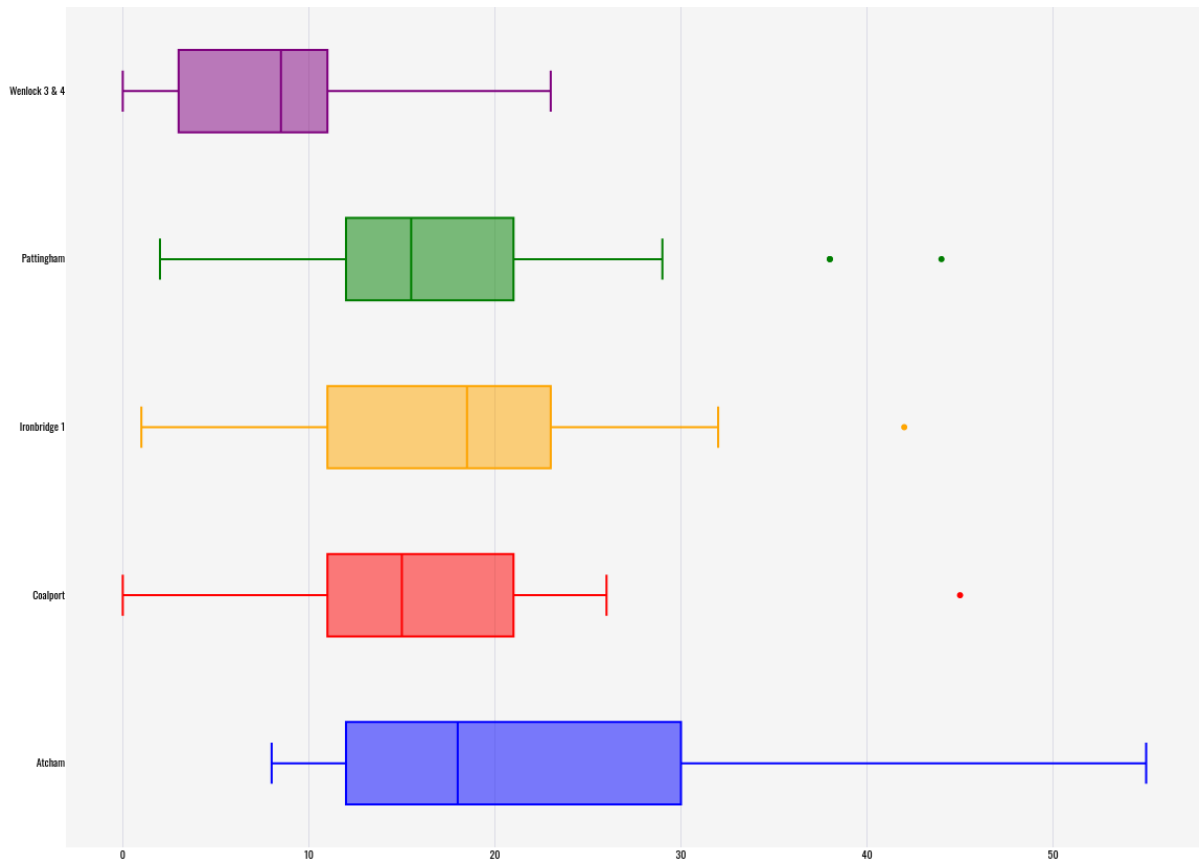
Box plot of how many times items in each room were watched on catch-up

In total, there were 1062 views on catch-up.

Tech

Our contract with the TIC did not include Internet access in the price (except the free wifi), and also excluded power in the Ironbridge and (I think) Atcham suites, though it did include power from wall and floor outlets in the smaller rooms. So we had to pay extra for seven wired Internet feeds (the five programme rooms plus the Green Room and Ops Hub), and for power in the Main and Second Programmes and the Art Show (we simply didn't offer power to dealers in Ironbridge 2).

The TIC has its own in-house production company, Stagecraft UK. Event organisers don't in general have to use their services, except for certain venue-specific things like power, Internet and rigging. However it turned out that the price for power, Internet and rigging goes up a lot if you're not using them for other things (or you don't get a discount off the list price, but it comes to the same thing).

We found Stagecraft very difficult to negotiate with on price, because they simply don't work the way that we're used to. We're very price-sensitive, since our only significant revenue comes from our membership fees. We're used to companies operating in a competitive market, who give you an itemised quotation, and you can then pick the items you want off the list without the item prices changing if you don't take all of it. They don't give big bulk or package discounts because they can't – their item prices are already competitive, and

significant discounts would push them into loss. We were continually trying to do this with Stagecraft, and continually being told that it was a package deal, and taking items off it wouldn't make it cheaper. At one point they also forgot what they'd already agreed to and trebled their prices compared to previous quotes, which caused us some concern. Some of their equipment (e.g. projectors) is quite old and outdated, but still being priced as if it was brand new.

Ironically, if they *had* allowed us to pick and choose which items to go for on their lowest-priced quotation, we'd probably have gone for much (though not all) of it, and they'd have got more revenue. As it was, in the main we only used them for the things we had to buy from them.

On the day, Stagecraft's delivery of the stage and rigging in Ironbridge, and the projectors in Coalport and Pattingham, was good. The pipe and drape that fenced off a corner of Ironbridge 2 (Dealers) for childcare was a bit sloppy but worked. The Internet feeds caused us some serious issues during setup and into the start of the convention, with cable and patching errors that should have been spotted and rectified earlier, and at least one damaged patch cable that failed during use.

Overall, Stagecraft was the aspect of working with the TIC that we were least happy with.

Team

We went into the planning for Levitation knowing that it was a long haul, 2 year committee, and that the presence of a Worldcon in the UK would reduce our Pool. We had a high turnover due to life events, but the resignation and handover protocols and policy documents were followed in all cases, and very little was lost or dropped.

Recruitment of volunteers went very well. We recruited 89 volunteers, or just under 20% of the convention, and as many people helped out without formally offering. We think around 25% of people were engaged in making everything happen. Thank you to everyone.

There is a growing need for expertise in software and tech, that it may be that we cannot provide entirely through a volunteer team. This year we chose to hire in tech support and feel that this was the right decision.

Transport

We are accustomed to rail engineering works taking place over the Easter weekend, and this year was no exception with disruption to the main west-coast line. However it was made much worse by a landslip just to the west of Telford meaning that on the Thursday before the convention there were no trains from Shrewsbury and only a two-hourly shuttle service from Wolverhampton. This is of course unlikely to be repeated in future years.

Road access was easier – the M54 is the main road to Telford, and there were roadworks before Easter but they had finished before the convention started. There was of course the usual bank holiday traffic.

Telford is not particularly convenient for any international airport – Birmingham International is on the other side of Birmingham, and Manchester and Liverpool airports are well to the north with inconvenient train connections. We did have a few European and North American members, but it wouldn't be a great venue for a convention that was aiming to attract a large international membership.

Venue

The TIC is a purpose-built convention centre near the centre of Telford, a new town in Shropshire. The shopping centre is less than half a mile away, and the railway station (which is on the train line between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury) is about a mile away. The M54 motorway goes through the town.

There are two on-site hotels owned by the same company (the International hotel and Holiday Inn), two budget hotels between the venue and the town centre (Travelodge and Premier Inn Telford International Centre), a further budget hotel near the station (Premier Inn Telford Central), and Ramada and Mercure hotels on the far side of the town centre (the former of which is also owned by the TIC).

Members' opinions on Telford as a town rather than the TIC itself were mixed. The chain restaurants such as Wildwood and Wagamama were welcome and widely used, but some more independent and varied eating options in the town centre would have been welcome. People did not generally go as far afield as Shrewsbury or Ironbridge, even though they are only a 15 minute drive away.

The accessibility of the town was undermined by unexpected building works which prevented access for taxis.

The gradient of the path into town is difficult in a manual wheelchair, and the uneven late-night route from the Holiday Inn back to the town-centre budget hotels was especially challenging for wheelchair users (see also below under Hotels). We should have more strongly advised wheelchair users to stay in the International or Holiday Inn hotels.

Despite being a modern building, the TIC has one moderately serious accessibility issue, which is that it has only one passenger lift, and that lift is too small for the largest powered mobility scooters. The venue informs us that they have a planning application in for a new elevator. They were very supportive with the use of the goods elevators but this is not ideal.

Some of the convention centre doors (e.g. the Ironbridge suite) have hold-backs that will hold the doors open but release and close them automatically in the event of a fire, but many do not. They all should, since it's not possible to open those doors from a wheelchair or scooter, and we don't have enough volunteers to station one permanently by every door, and so it would have been better for every room to have an open door. We were allowed to prop some of the doors open on the basis that the volunteer on duty in the room would close them in the event of a fire alarm.