

Executive Board – Appendix 1: Town Hall Audience Survey Comments Analysis

Three main questions were asked in the survey where people were able to provide their own responses. The comments received were assigned categories for analysis and have been summarised below under each question.

Question 22: How did we do? Any general comments about Leeds Town Hall, the cultural programme, specific event you attended

924 comments were received in answer to this question.

- Generally positive comments

419 comments were generally positive about the Town Hall and their experience, for example:-

“A fantastic asset for all those who live or visit Leeds!”

“Couldn't wish for a more welcoming and awesome venue”

“It is a wonderful venue, worthy of the great music on offer”

Other words and phrases used here include: impressive, excellent, very good, atmospheric, unique, great venue, beautiful, always enjoy visiting, a treat to enter. Quite a few people felt that the building has potential and should be used more.

- Programme

384 comments received were related to the programme.

The majority of the comments received were positive about the programme – saying that it is varied, interesting, there is a good range and they are pleased with the diversity. One person commented that the programme is and always has been good. There was a feeling that the venue lends itself to many forms of entertainment. Particular aspects of the programme were praised, such as the Town Hall tours (which were highly recommended), Nigel Kennedy, Christy Moore, Motown, comedy, the Beer Festival and LIFF. The Wagner Ring Cycle was mentioned as a triumph by a couple of people. The Concert Season was felt by many people to be excellent, with memorable concerts in a magnificent setting. Many said they have attended for quite a few years and always enjoy themselves.

“The classical music concerts at the Town Hall fill a very special place in my life and were a source of happiness at a particularly difficult time in my life. Each one remains a special event. I miss them over the summer. The pre-concert talks are stimulating.”

“I really enjoy the international concert season - we are so fortunate in Leeds - and also the lunchtime concerts. I occasionally get the opportunity to take part in a choral concert and can then take in the full glory of the hall.”

“I love the use of the town hall as a film venue. It's good to use as something different from the norm, both in the term of itself as a venue and in the films that are usually shown there.”

However, a number of comments stated they would like the programme to be more adventurous and varied.

Some people felt the programme is heavily weighted towards classical, and there were requests for more rock, jazz, folk, theatre, pop and stand-up comedy, also more mid-week music events.

“I would like more talks and cheaper or free events. A lot of the town Hall events don't interest me because they are focused on classical music and seem to be aimed at older people.”

“The wider the variety of events the better to appeal and cater for as many people in the city as possible.”

One person mentioned they would love to see “2001: A Space Odyssey” with a live orchestra. Someone suggested having an area to dance for the Motown evenings. There were also suggestions of more exhibitions and photography. A few people mentioned that a younger audience needs to be attracted, perhaps through a more progressive programme, as it tends to be “pensioner dominated.” A couple of people commented that they would like more events for younger children as they struggle to find suitable activities for them. There were frequent mentions of the building being under-utilised and that there should be more advertising and marketing. One person commented that they’d like to receive emails of upcoming events so they can book tickets before they sell out. Quite a few didn’t realise the range of events at the Town Hall and were pleased that it offers a wider programme than some venues. A few comments related to the venue being thought of as “high-brow” or imposing and one person mentioned that it was great to see the venue being used for less elitist events such as the Beer Festival, film and vintage fairs.

- Seating

137 comments were related to seating.

Most of the comments received stated that the seating is cramped and uncomfortable and that the lack of an incline often affects their enjoyment of the performance. The view was mentioned as poor, depending on where people were sitting. People also indicated that it can be hard to find their seats and that the numbering is poor. There were some comments that it can be hard to get out when needed without disturbing other people. Wheelchair seating was felt to be cold and draughty and a few comments were received about seating being difficult for disabled people. A number of comments mentioned that the seating is too close together with a lack of leg-room and that more aisles are needed. It is generally felt to be past its best.

A few people felt that the view and seating are good, and that the balcony seating has improved. Others mentioned that they liked sitting in the orchestra risers and that it is good to be able to choose where to sit.

- Acoustics

123 comments were related to the acoustics.

Comments here were very mixed, ranging from good to dreadful! Most people said that it depends on where they are sitting. There were a few comments about intrusive sounds e.g. sirens, noise from the bar in the foyer. The acoustics are felt to be poor for some events e.g. classical, folk. A few people felt the acoustics are poor compared to other venues such as Bridgewater Hall, Liverpool and Birmingham. Some said they had improved but are still not great and a few mentioned that the sound is better at the back. A few comments about the acoustics being good were received but it does seem very dependent on seat location.

- Building

210 comments were related to the fabric of the building.

Many of the comments described the building as dramatic, impressive, beautiful and historic with stunning architecture. One person mentioned that they always enjoy the sense of history and luxury. The Victoria Hall in particular is felt to be atmospheric and amazing.

“An exciting atmosphere produced by the splendour of the building.”

“Architecturally, I feel very proud that we have such a hall in this city.”

A significant amount of comments stated that the building looks tired and needs some refurbishment and a “lick of paint” to make it look less neglected and out of date. One person said that the entrance is grand but this doesn’t follow through to the rest of the building, and the other rooms lack appeal. A few people said that aspects of the building, e.g. corridors and the bar area feel municipal and don’t reflect the grandeur of the Hall. One person said that the stage area needs a face-lift. Quite a lot of comments were about the temperature and that it can get too hot and needs air conditioning, also that it can get draughty upstairs at times. Someone mentioned that the building needs another lift. Some people said that the building is a bit over the top, formal and civic, although others appreciate that about it. There were a few suggestions about refurbishing the lions before they disintegrate. Signage is also an area that many people would like to see addressed – it was felt to be poor and people can get lost in the corridors. Some people could see improvements but felt that more needed to be done.

- Catering/bar

155 comments were related to catering or bar provision.

Most of these were asking for current facilities to be improved and invested in - many saying the bar area was poor, it takes too long to get a drink and they’re put off by the queues, options are limited, it would be nice to hang around and socialise but the area isn’t conducive to this, and the space is cramped. There were one or two suggestions of refreshments for people coming straight from work, one person commented that meals timed to attend pre-concert talks would be useful. Someone suggested a pre-event dinner package. Another mentioned taking guests to the Tiled Hall café before events at the Town Hall. Two people remembered the old café with fondness. One person commented that they liked the bar for Leeds International Film Festival.

- Toilets

59 comments were related to toilets.

The vast majority of these were asking for more toilets, and for improvements to the current ones. Comments were that they need smartening up or refurbishing, the standard of the toilets doesn’t match the venue and that they are limited, slow to flush, cubicles are too small and they are poorly signposted. Four people commented that the toilets smell and a couple said they are inadequate and disgusting. One mentioned that it wasn’t easy for wheelchair users to access the toilets. One comment was in relation to being told there was a rule about not going to the toilet during a performance – they understood it would distract the artist but meant that they were uncomfortable during the performance. There was one comment that they had improved and one that they were good.

- Access

41 comments were related to access to the building/activities.

Comments in this area were again quite mixed with many people saying that the building is easily accessible, caters well for disabled people and is in a central location with good proximity to the station. One wheelchair user said they prefer the Town Hall to some venues as it is accessible and welcoming and another said there were some of the best positions for wheelchairs. However someone else disagreed and said their sons had the worst view which seemed unfair. Main issues seemed to be not enough lifts meaning disabled people can end up getting to their seats quite late, and uncomfortable seating. If someone is sitting in the risers, it can mean they have quite a walk from the lift. The lift was also felt to be quite small. Another felt that evacuating from the gallery would be very slow in an emergency. Someone mentioned that the induction loop was not helpful. Other comments categorised as related to access included a couple where people were having difficulty with online booking and finding out about events, that the website could be better to book specific seats and that you can’t get concessions online.

- Staff

39 comments were related to staff.

The most common words used to describe the staff are friendly, pleasant, helpful and welcoming. One person said that the staff are the most helpful they had experienced. There were a few comments about the Box Office being very good and excellent over the phone. Another comment was received about a perceived shortage of staff, and one more mentioned that staff seemed to be very busy. The same person felt that it was difficult to identify staff as their uniform was not prominent. One or two people seemed confused that the box office was based at the Carriageworks, not the Town Hall and found staff to be unhelpful in directing them. Others gave examples of when staff had helped them, including being very helpful when someone needed to take a stool into the hall due to having had a toe removed, and a couple whose view was obscured due to speakers who were moved to one of the boxes by a kind steward during the interval.

- Parking/transport

64 comments were related to parking or transport to the city centre.

While a few people commented that parking was convenient and the Town Hall is accessible and handy for the train station, the overwhelming majority felt that parking was a problem – being very expensive and difficult to find. It was also described as very poor, stressful, and a few people said they may reconsider attending when on-street parking becomes charged. One person said the expense of parking put people off and the city centre is unpleasant to wait for buses on an evening.

Disabled parking was seen as difficult as the spaces in front of the Town Hall fill up very quickly, especially as any blue badge holders can access it, not just concert attendees. Another person commented that it needs better management.

In terms of public transport, many people had issues with buses or trains being scarce in the evening, saying that a more direct, frequent service would help. Several people commented that they didn't feel safe waiting in town at night for public transport and that the city centre isn't visitor friendly. It was also felt to be difficult in that people were having to leave early to make last buses or trains and would prefer there to be more late night transport, or earlier performances. Someone said that the coach service was excellent and another person suggested arranging cheaper travel.

One person mentioned they would like to see undercover cycle parking for when it's raining.

- Prices

32 comments were related to prices.

A number of people commented that tickets are good value, reasonable and affordable, however many thought certain concerts are too expensive; Christy Moore and the John Wilson Orchestra in particular were mentioned. Several people said that they would come more often if the tickets were cheaper. There were a few comments that some concerts are too expensive for retired people and those on benefits, and one person thought that perhaps there should be a Leeds Card discount.

- Choice

Most of the comments (174) related to the choice of refreshments – the general feeling is that it is much too limited and a better selection is needed. One person said that they would have spent more at the bar but that wasn't possible as the choice was so limited. Many people mentioned that the choice of drinks is unappealing, requesting more variety of wine, beer and coffee and that water should be available in jugs on the bar. A couple of people said that the tea and coffee cups were small. Quite a few comments indicated that people would like to see more draft

cask beer and local ales on offer. The bars during the Beer Festival and LIFF were appealing and felt to be very good, with an excellent range. One person mentioned that they appreciated being able to take their beer in to see the film. A couple of comments around the separate bars indicated that people would like to have the coffee and alcohol bars together. In terms of variety, it was also felt that there should be more non-alcoholic drinks on offer.

In relation to food, requests were received for pre-concert meals, cakes, sandwiches, chocolate and more savoury snacks. There was also mention of the selection being poor for people with diabetes as there isn't much with low sugar. Another person said they were surprised by the lack of Leeds or Yorkshire products.

A few people said they would like to be able to make card payments rather than only cash.

- Queues

A large amount of comments were received (140) relating to how busy the area gets and having to queue. Many of these were saying that it is always crowded with long queues which can put people off, and can mean they don't have much time to return to their seats after the interval. It also means that the bar can run out of items by the time the people from the back get to the front of the queue, which some people said was frustrating for them. There were quite a few comments about the service being slow, although some said that despite the bar being very busy they were served quickly.

Various comments mentioned that where pre-ordering was possible it certainly helped and was useful, although this also sometimes took a bit long.

Décor

The majority of people were asking for more seating. The layout was felt to be important as many people said the atmosphere didn't feel conducive to relaxing, due to seats being in rows or round the edge in a circle. The surroundings were described as drab, unattractive and not a place to linger. There were a few suggestions of refurbishing the bar area or providing an additional bar. It was also felt to be cramped, uncomfortable and there was mention of the bar getting very warm at times.

A couple of people mentioned that depending on where they are sitting, sound can leak through from the bar and they can hear general noise and cups being collected and moved about etc.

One person said they loved the facility and it was very clean.

- Staff

48 comments were related to staff. Most of these were positive – many of them saying staff are friendly, helpful, efficient and welcoming. The service was generally felt to be good, speedy and one person used the word "ace". A few people said they felt that staff are unfriendly, un-interested and had a bad attitude and one person thought the inexperience of staff led to long queues. Several comments related to staff being busy and that they do their best.

One person mentioned that a steward was particularly helpful in bringing a drink to them when they couldn't get to the bar in their wheelchair as it was so busy.

- Price

57 comments were related to price. The vast majority of the comments received indicated that people felt that drinks and ice creams are too expensive. Some mentioned that the basics, i.e. tea and coffee should be cheaper. One or two said the prices are ok for a treat and reasonably priced, with one person saying they are no more than any other venue.

The main issue seemed to be that the prices were felt to be poor in relation to the quality of the refreshments. It appeared that people may not mind paying a little more for good quality and service.

- Didn't use/weren't aware

Not many comments fell into this category (only 24); with people generally either saying that they couldn't find the bar or didn't know there was one. A few said that they didn't use the bar because the service is slow and their choices are limited.

Question 13: How did we do? What were your first impressions of the entrance into the Town Hall?

On the whole, first impressions were overwhelmingly positive. People described the entrance and building as impressive, beautiful, magnificent, atmospheric, grand, buzzing, historic, welcoming, lovely, splendid and stunning. There were several comments to the effect that the building is thought of as clean. Quite a few people said they had been on many occasions so were past first impressions but they always enjoy attending events in the building.

Some quotes:

"A beautiful old Victorian building - completely OTT and stunning."

"Busy, lively, anticipatory. All looking forward to a superb evening."

"Excellent, impressive old building beautiful decoration. Seem to remember a nice temporary bar with real ale and cocktails which was a nice welcome!"

"I love the building. It was the first time my husband had been inside and I felt proud to be showing him how fantastic it is."

"It's a beautiful building; the entrance hall is lovely and the main stage excellent. As we attended during November as part of the film festival the pillars on the outside were clad in fairy lights. We love the building so much we've decided to have our wedding ceremony there this November - it will be stunning."

A small number of comments were received which described the Town Hall as old fashioned, cold, stark, tired and unwelcoming.

When describing their first impressions, people often mentioned the architecture, the ceiling, tiled floor in the vestibule, the Victoria Hall and the organ. People felt that the building has character and someone said it makes them proud of their city.