The Future of Eastercon

A discussion

November 2015

At Dysprosium…

- At a programmed panel ~200 people came
- 1,000 people didn't or couldn't
- We were asked to think about the future of Eastercon
- So we decided to ask as many people as we could
- Questionnaire on-line during October
- Just over 200 people answered it

Why a questionnaire?

- to include people who weren't at the programme item / convention

- to gather opinions from people who might not otherwise get involved

- to have a record of the questions asked and the answers

- for statistics and analysis that can be checked by other people

- not assuming we know everything (or even anything)

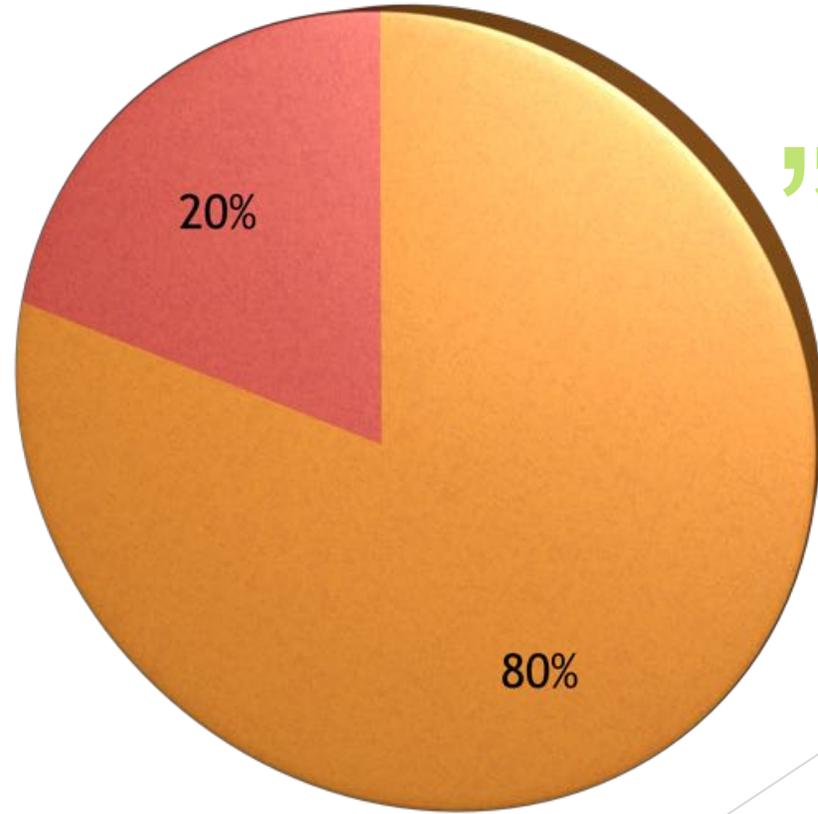- to gather opinion that might not be shared in a public forum

"What do you know about Eastercon?

- We tried to get enough information from enough people about who they are and their interest in Eastercons to check whether we can actually base future actions on these answers.

- We wanted:
    - a good spread of Eastercon membership/participation - we think we got that with some minor reservations (under-25, professionals/artists/exhibitors/sponsors)
    - people who don't/can't go to bidding sessions - we think we got that - about half of our respondents don't go to bidding sessions.
    - people who knew/cared more or less about Eastercons - we think we got some spread (we started by asking "What do you know about Eastercons?", and about 20% ticked "I knew some of that").

"The question we asked

- We asked if people knew some of the administrative aspects of Eastercon:
  - Run by volunteers
  - Different people each year
  - Bid process
  - Memberships rather than tickets

● I knew all that
● I knew some of that
● I didn't know any of that

20%

80%

"Reasons for attending Eastercons

▶ We got about 300 answers from 200 respondents - 43% ticked more than one option. No surprises. Commonest things mentioned in "Other" are:

   ▶ Variations on Financial Constraints

   ▶ Go to see and make friends

   ▶ Variations on whether the location is easy to get to

"It's where I meet like-minded people in an environment where we each can be who we are."

"What should Eastercon do differently?

- Highest area of concern was: "Welcome to new fans and people attending for the first time"
  - Needs Urgent Improvement - 14
  - Could do with Improvement - 71
- Then: "Communications with programme participants, dealers, artists, sponsors, exhibitors, volunteers"
  - Needs Urgent Improvement - 5
  - Could do with Improvement - 37
- and "communication with members"
  - Needs Urgent Improvement - 5
  - Could do with Improvement - 32
- encouragingly low numbers for "needs urgent attention"
- encouragingly high numbers across all questions for "Is working Okay" and "Is working well"
- and low numbers for "don't have an opinion" mean that answers to this section are fairly definitive

"What is your suggestion for improvement - a few of the suggestions"

▶ Being responsive to the changes in fandom, particularly in terms of diversity (although actually fandom has always been diverse).

▶ Eastercon needs to look at how it welcomes new attendees. This might be "Newbie meets", social ice breakers such as steampunk's "Mad Hatter's Tea Party" or a structured system with identifiable guides.

▶ Much better communication for people new to Eastercons. It seems from talking to new people that the event is seen as cliquey, unwelcoming to newcomers and difficult to access unless you're brought in by people who are already regulars.

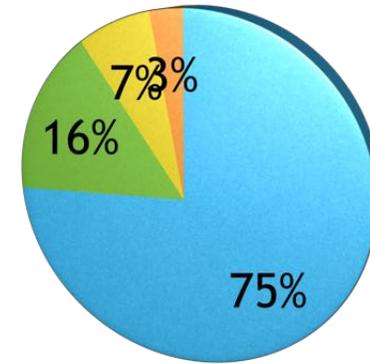▶ Reply to all emailed questions within 1 week of an emailed query. Even if the answer is "We don't know yet".

"What is your suggestion for improvement - a few of the suggestions"

- Reduce their size *drastically*. Concentrate on *one* aspect of sf/ sfandom (such as books) and let other fandoms (trekkies, film, games, media) go their own sweet way.

- Find some way to include other fandoms, e.g. Harry Potter or Discworld fandoms, who have events as big or bigger themselves.

- Better communications options for people with limited access (or ability) to use computers.

- …keep the website updated so people can find any public information there easily when they need it, and enable members to choose a preferred means of notification for important updates…
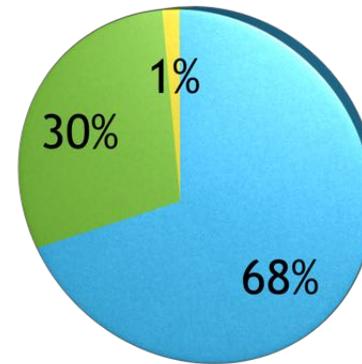
"Running the Eastercon

- ▶ we got almost half our answers from people who don't go to bidding sessions - which is good

- ▶ three quarters of our respondents would care if there were no more Eastercons

- ▶ people do seem to know how we decide on the next Eastercon and we could make some tweaks but people are basically okay with it

- ▶ the "owns" assets was an education question - and 30% said "no" so maybe that was useful

Would care if no more Eastercons?

- ● Yes
- ● No
- ● Something Else
- ● Didn't Answer

7% 2%
16%
75%

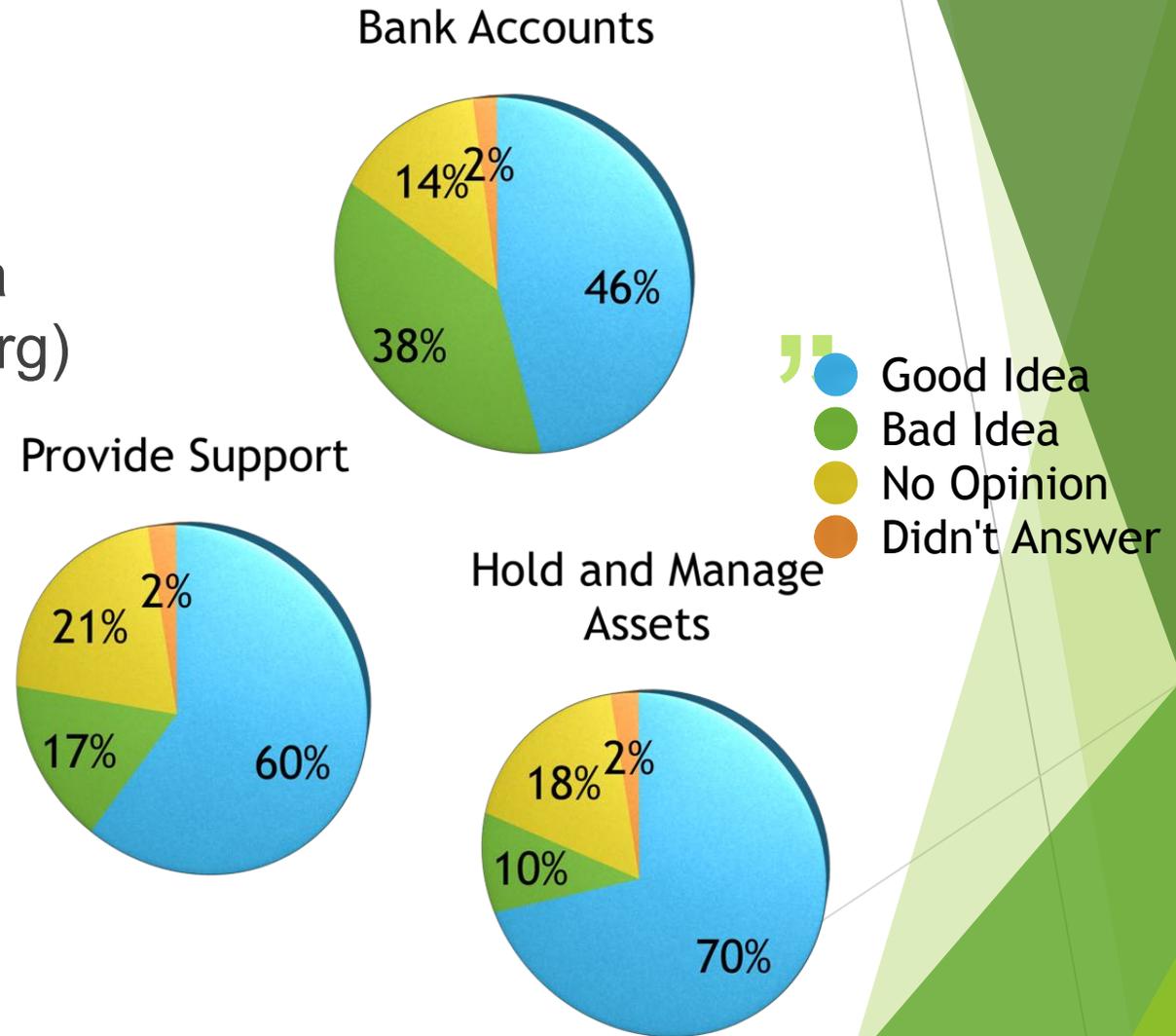## Owns Assets?

- ● Yes
- ● No
- ● Didn't Answer

1%
30%
68%

Issues for Eastercon

- it seems we have broad agreement on the issues, with a couple of comments to make

- relatively high level of "no opinion" on issues that worry committees but don't impact obviously at the actual event

- some good information for future committees/conrunners to chew over

- and only one spotted something that we didn't ask about:

"...a mild surprise that the problem with finding venues for the Eastercon wasn't mentioned anywhere as a challenge." - oops!

Improving the Eastercon

▶ High support for a central organisation, and for all three reasons for having it, and for a website (promote Eastercon.org)

▶ medium or lower support for charter and conrunners con
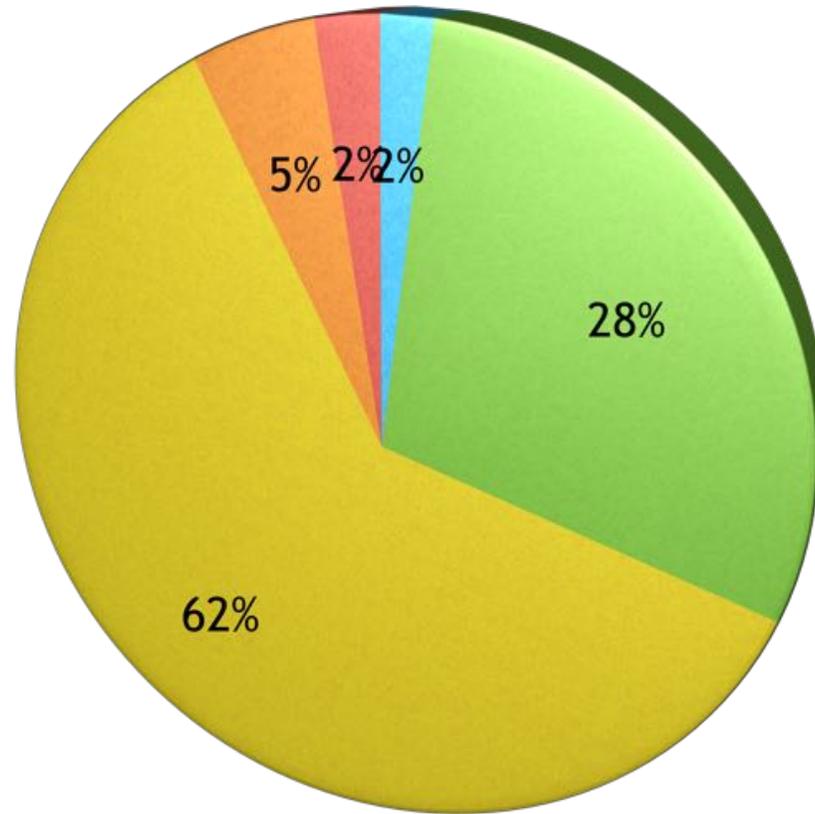
▶ lots of useful comment/ information

Bank Accounts

14% 2%
46%
38%

Good Idea
Bad Idea
No Opinion
Didn't Answer

Provide Support

21% 2%
17% 60%

Hold and Manage Assets

18% 2%
10% 70%

"Please tell us about your experience of Eastercons

- good spread of involvement - both by type of engagement and years of engagement

- good spread of conrunning experience

"

"Interesting survey, looking forward to seeing the results - tho' I was surprised there was no specific mention of / questions addressed to people attending as panel participants / writers / other creatives / publishers, etc."
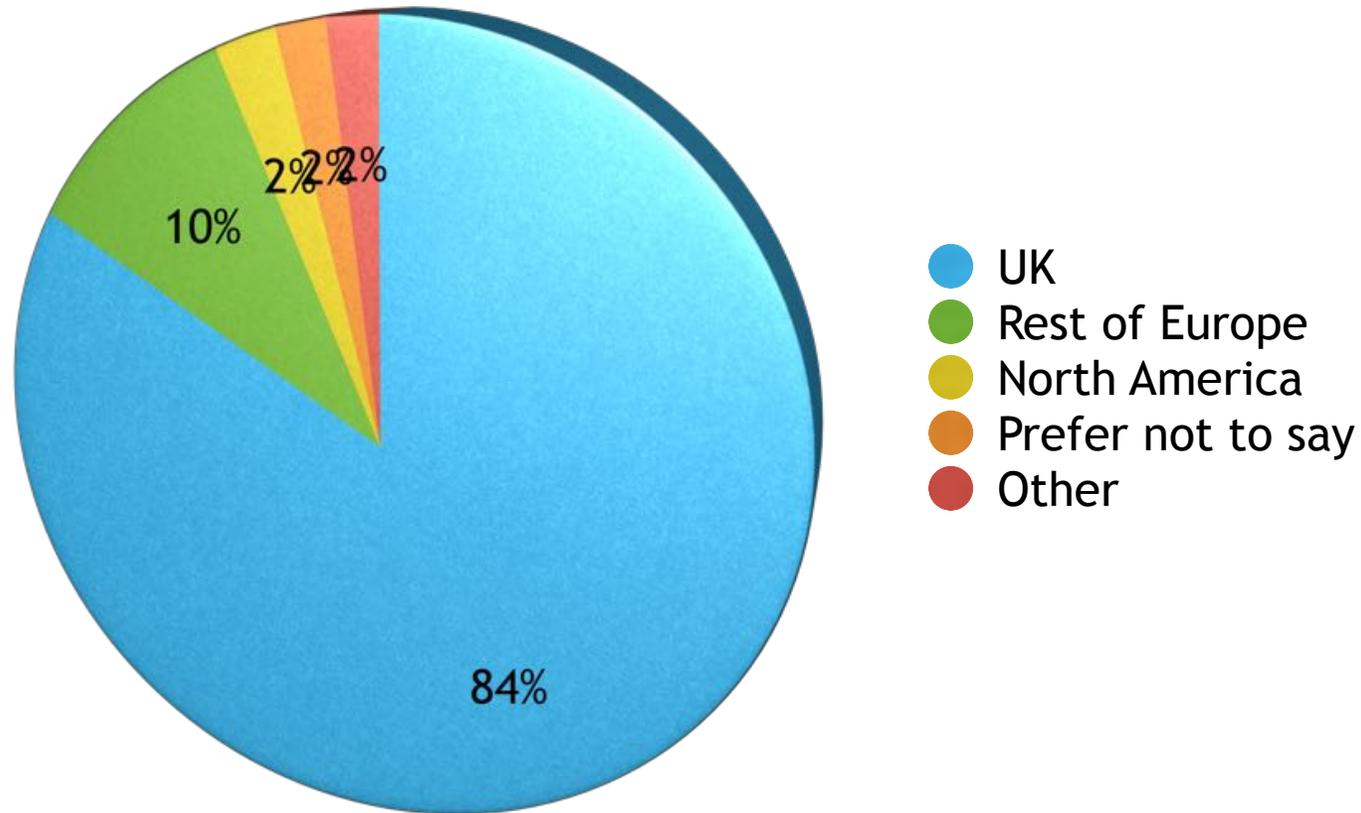
205 Respondents - What is Your Age?

28%

62%

5% 2% 2%

- Under 25
- 25-44
- 45-64
- 65+
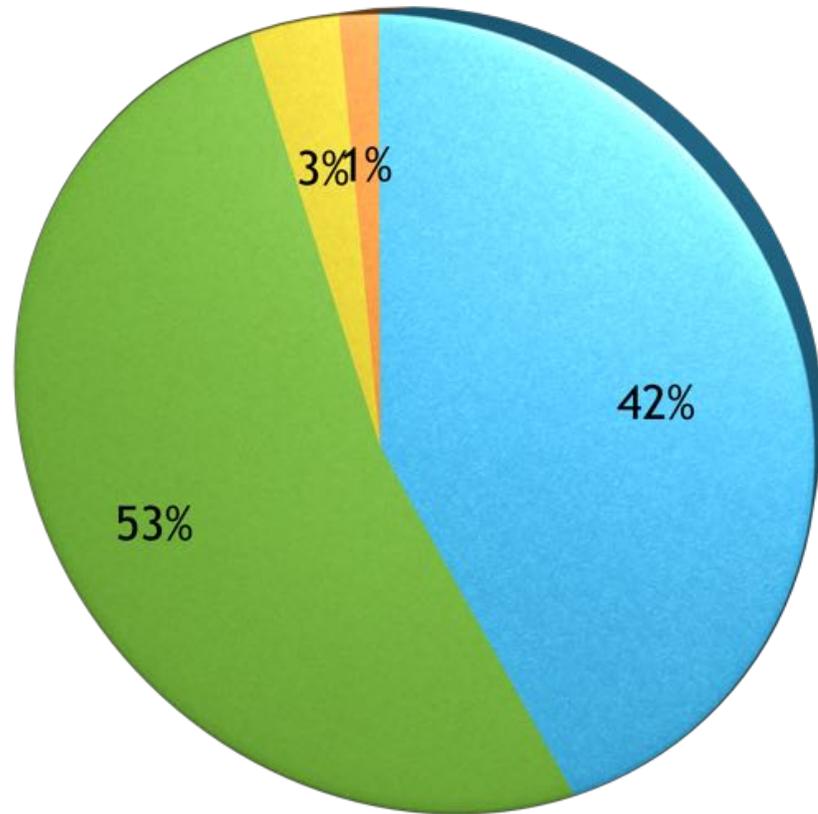- Prefer not to say

"205 Respondents: What Country Do You Live in?

Pie chart:
- UK — 84%
- Rest of Europe — 10%
- North America — 2%
- Prefer not to say — 2%
- Other — 2%

Legend:
- UK
- Rest of Europe
- North America
- Prefer not to say
- Other

"205 Respondents: What Gender Are You?

Legend:
- Female (42%)
- Male (53%)
- Prefer not to say (3%)
- Other (1%)

"Any final comments…

- 64 comments - Of which:
  - 32 offered thoughts about one or more aspects of Eastercon
    - 13 around accessibility, date, venue or location
    - 10 around culture
    - 7 around organisation
    - 2 very general
  - 13 expressed thanks for undertaking the Future of Eastercon survey and conversation
  - 8 expressed general support for Eastercon
  - 8 made general comments about themselves or the exercise

"

"Any final comments… cont'd

- 3 offered thoughts about an aspect of the Future of Eastercon exercise - which we have picked up

- "In discussion with other conrunners/workers we are very suspicious of this. We all know what the road to Hell was paved with, and this looks like it." 〞

- "Interesting survey, looking forward to seeing the results - tho' I was surprised there was no specific mention of / questions addressed to people attending as panel participants / writers / other creatives / publishers, etc."

- "No, just a mild surprise that the problem with finding venues for the Eastercon wasn't mentioned anywhere as a challenge.

- One volunteered to join Future of Eastercon.

- One volunteered to help out West Country/Welsh conventions.

"Pertinent Quotes

- "I have always enjoyed my Eastercon experience, and I am very grateful to all the committees and volunteers over the years who make these events happen."

- "In a climate where fandom is becoming more and more corporate, it's incredibly valuable to have a convention that is about interaction and involvement between fans more than it is about being a passive consumer of content."

- "It would be a shame if you let apathy and ageism stop Eastercon from becoming the counter to the commercial excesses of MCM. We need you to be the BBC to MCM's Sky."

"Suggestions for the FOE Group:

- Look at options/costs/benefits for a central body - lots of people think this is a good idea for several reasons

- Look at options/costs/benefits for beefing up Eastercon's ongoing Internet and Social Media (eastercon.org etc) - lots of people think this is a good idea "

- Try and talk to some under-25s (or under 30s) - we don't know enough about what younger people think

- Try and talk specifically to programme participants/writers/other creatives/publishers etc - they have a different set of considerations and we don't know enough about what they think

- Anything else **we** should try to do?

"Suggestions for "US" to do

▶ Try and come up with some new ideas specifically to improve matters for new/first time members - this is the single most major concern

"What should we do between now and Mancunicon?"

- ► (a) Do people agree that these ~200 responses are a good enough basis for prioritising work on some of the suggested solutions?

- ► (b) If No or Abstention, what should we do between now and Mancunicon?

- ► (c) If Yes, what should we do between now and Mancunicon?

"Get Involved

We're going to continue with this, telling people what we've done.

▶ Talk to any of us and offer to help going forward.

▶ Email: eastercon@vraidex.com

▶ eastercon.wordpress.com

"