

Hay
Festival
Hay-on-Wye

Report



22 May —
1 June 2025



Contents

Welcome to Hay Festival 2025	4
Hay Festival in numbers	6
The programme in detail	8
Bestsellers	15
Education, outreach and widening access	18
Green	22
The Festival in the media	25
The Festival in quotes	26
Our funding	29
With thanks	30
Hay Festival Global	35

Welcome to Hay Festival 2025

Thank you, Haymakers, for discovering *a world of different* with us this spring.

Over the past twelve months, we've seen the speed at which our world can change and the high stakes for our times. This spring, we presented a programme to tackle our shared challenges head on with purpose and hope, celebrating new ideas and the power of storytelling to improve our lives.

On stage and off, we explored the impacts of AI, health and wellbeing, new political orders and intergenerational exchanges – plus, as we celebrated 20 years since our first overseas event, we opened more global exchanges through new platforms.

New and emerging artists were showcased in a range of Festival initiations, including The Platform, Writers at Work and our Debut Discoveries series, while headline names filled venues in 647 events over 11 days.

As well as the very best books, we showcased a range of projects to spark deep discussion: South to North Conversations offered new perspectives on global challenges (page 9), there were daily news panels and the return of our Sports Day (page 8).

And there was joy too as the world's greatest storytellers entertained us with new work. Plus, a heady dose of music, comedy and performance kept the party going late into the evenings.

Beyond the programme, our free-to-enter Festival village had an upgrade too, with new spaces to experience, like our MUBI cinema.

As a charity, our mission is to open doors to cultural exchange. Our free schools programme saw thousands of young people engaging in culture. And for those who couldn't join us in person we offered multiple access points online: our Online Festival Pass offered access to handpicked events; the BBC's free programmes, recorded live on site; and live in libraries with the Living Knowledge Network's live streamed events.

Hay Festival 2025 was open to everyone, and the ripples of inspiration continue to generate benefits.

Thank you for your support. See you soon!

Julie Finch

Julie Finch
CEO, Hay Festival Global



Hay Festival in numbers

days **11**

artists **729**

events **647**

tickets issued **200,000+**

increase in ticket sales **9%**

books sold **52,358**

increase in books sold **10%**

social media impressions
via Festival channels **90 million**

web users **760,000**

web page views **6,709,000**

pupils participating in free
school events in person **6,725**

teachers participating in free
school events in person **522**

online school attendances **2,804**

The programme in detail

Hay Festival 2025 offered something for everyone. Across 647 events, the programme launched the best new fiction and non-fiction books, provoked debate, and platformed solutions around the biggest issues of our times. There was world-class comedy and music, and a vibrant programme of pop-up events, workshops and activities for all ages.

New projects offered innovation and diversity in a programme that paired Festival favourites with new and exciting voices.

Debut Discoveries

The Debut Discoveries series, supported by the Hawthornden Foundation, showcased emerging writers alongside established names, offering opportunities for fresh talent to take part in Hay Festival events for the first time.

Sports Day

After a popular inaugural year, Hay Festival Sports Day returned on Wednesday 28 May. Worlds collided as leading thinkers join sports stars for a showcase of creative talent and interactive free activities all around the Festival site, led by Fencing Cymru, Sports Powys and organisations from the Welsh Sports Association.

Green

The latest environmental science, sustainable policies and creative responses to the climate crisis were brought into focus in Hay Festival Green.

Championing Wales

Wales and its cultural impact was championed in events with Literature Wales, BBC Wales, *Folding Rock*, Swansea University, and more, while a special visit from Wales' First Minister Eluned Morgan spotlighted the Festival's important role in showcasing culture in Wales.

Celebrating Hay-on-Wye

Hay-on-Wye's creative community was championed in events with Hay Writers' Circle, Hay Music, and Hereford College of Arts.

South to North Conversations

Conversations co-curated by Hay Festival teams in Mexico, Colombia and Peru with the support of the Open Society Foundations, spotlighted the shared issues – and solutions – facing the Global South.

International

A total of 35 countries were represented across our events, discussing subjects from the Middle East to rainforest conservation.

Lviv BookForum

Ukraine's biggest book festival, Lviv BookForum, came to Wales, co-curating events throughout the Festival to spotlight great Ukrainian storytelling and the state of Ukraine today.

Programming diversity

Wide-ranging global collaborations strengthened the diversity of programming, with additional partners including Black British Book Festival, British Council, The British Academy, National Literacy Trust, International Booker Prize, The Reading Agency, The Royal Society, BookAid International, the Eccles Institute for the Americas & Oceania at the British Library and scientific journal *Nature*.

Media partners

The BBC Marquee brought leading BBC audio programmes and podcasts to the Festival site in free events; journalists, commentators and world leaders took stock in the daily News Review live on stage each morning of the Festival, in partnership with the *Independent*; while additional media partners TikTok, *LRB*, *JUNO*, *Folding Rock*, *The TLS*, and the *FT* contributed to programming.

Hay Festival medals

Winners of the Hay Festival Medals 2025 were celebrated: Elif Shafak (Prose), Ruth Jones (Drama), and Michael Morpurgo (Fiction).





Illustrator in Residence

Lizzie Lomax was this Festival's Illustrator in Residence, creating the design for the programme cover and running a series of creative workshops on site.

Family Garden: Children & Young People

There was more than ever for families to enjoy at Hay Festival in the dedicated family area, featuring creative hubs, event venues and a family garden full of free activities to inspire young minds.

Get creative

A series of Festival sessions encouraged audiences to get creative, including fiction and non-fiction writing masterclasses with Arvon, plus vocal coach Juliet Russell led a special scratch choir session.

Late night wonders

Festival evenings were given over to great music, comedy and entertainment with unmissable one-off events blending local talent and international performers.

Lectures

Thought leaders delivered headline think pieces throughout the Festival, tackling some of the biggest questions of our times, including two new lectures: the George Alagiah Lecture with writer Hisham Matar and the John Caldon Lecture from the Pulitzer Prize-winning data journalist Mona Chalabi. Plus, returning annual lectures included environmental writer Mark Lynas on the threat of nuclear war, in the British Pugwash Lecture.

News Review

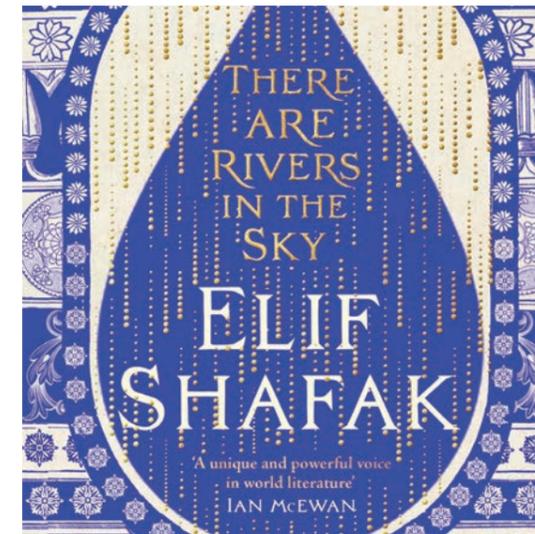
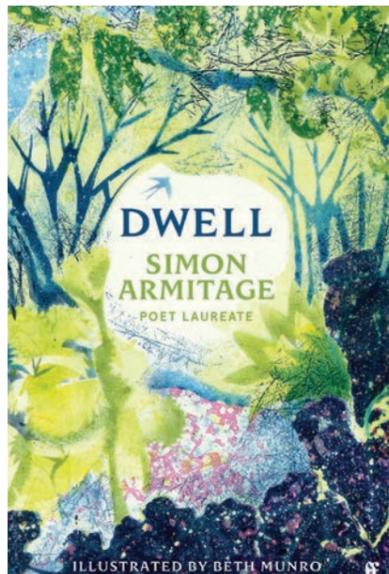
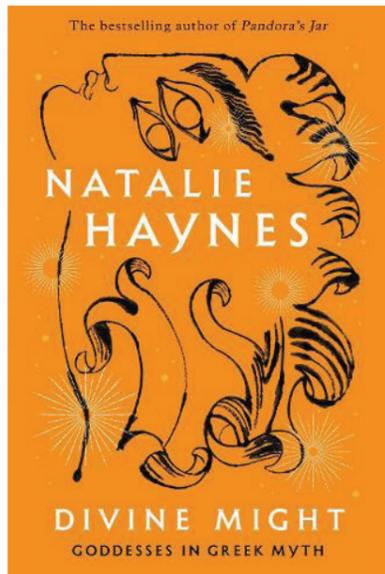
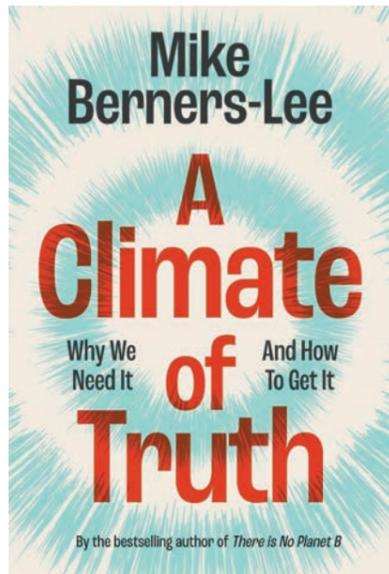
Journalists, commentators and world leaders took stock in the daily News Review each morning of the Festival, in partnership with the *Independent*.

Matters of Taste

New food events – Matters of Taste – brought flavours off the page for audiences in demonstrations while there were tastings hosted by local producers plus food writers on their latest collections.



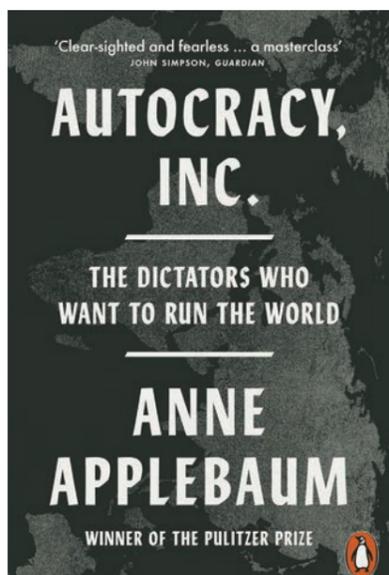
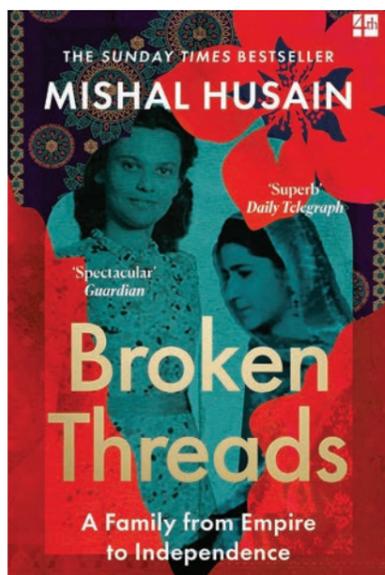
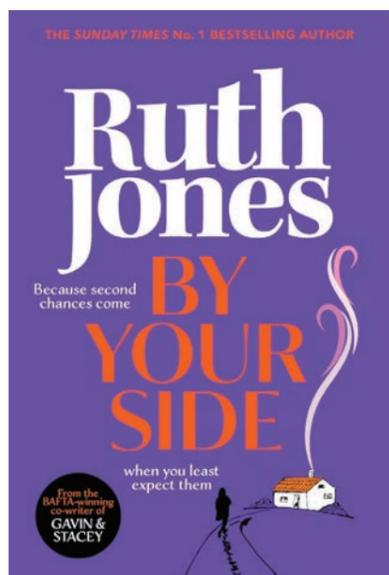
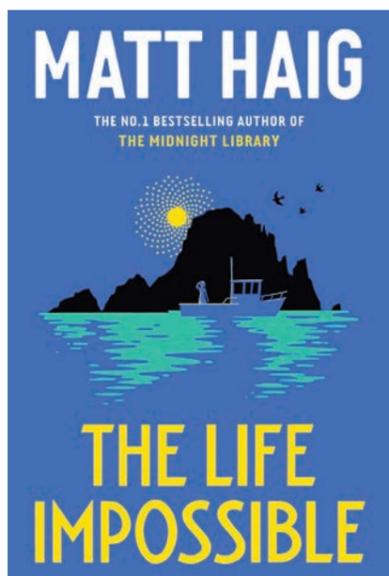
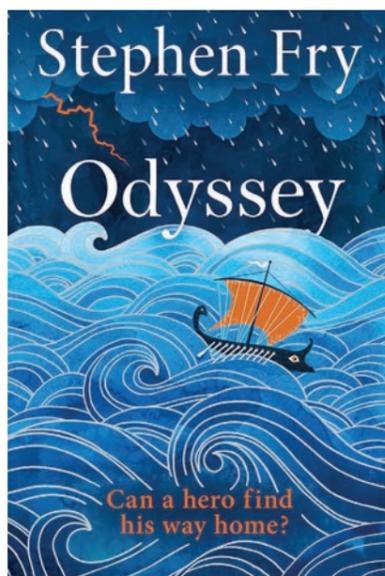
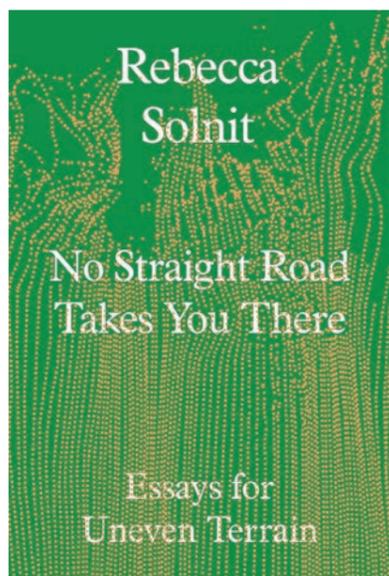




#1 bestseller

Bestsellers

Overall bestsellers



Elif Shafak <i>There are Rivers in the Sky</i>	1	Rebecca Solnit <i>No Straight Road Takes You There</i>	11
Anne Applebaum <i>Autocracy, Inc</i>	2	Simon Armitage <i>Dwell</i>	12
Ruth Jones <i>By Your Side</i>	3	Mike Berners-Lee <i>A Climate of Truth</i>	13
Alastair Campbell <i>But What Can I Do?</i>	4	Tom Holland <i>The Lives of the Caesars</i>	14
Matt Haig <i>The Life Impossible</i>	5	William Dalrymple <i>The Golden Road</i>	15
Robert Harris <i>Precipice</i>	6	Robert Macfarlane <i>Is a River Alive?</i>	16
Alexei Navalny <i>Patriot</i>	7	Sayeeda Warsi <i>Muslims Don't Matter</i>	17
Stephen Fry <i>Odyssey</i>	=8	Gareth Howell-Jones <i>Your Lowly Hedgehog Knows</i>	18
Ben Macintyre <i>The Siege</i>	=8	Natalie Haynes <i>Divine Might</i>	19
Mishal Husain <i>Broken Threads</i>	10	Jeremy Bowen <i>The Making of the Modern Middle East</i>	20

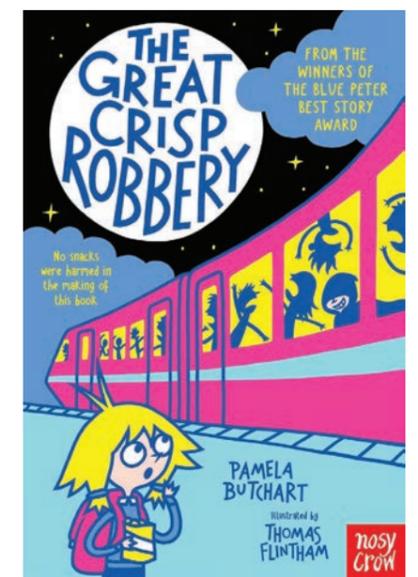
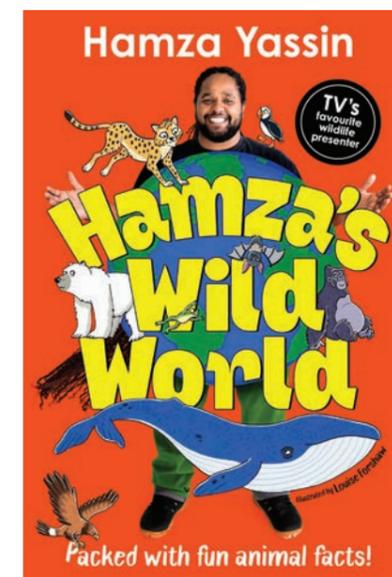
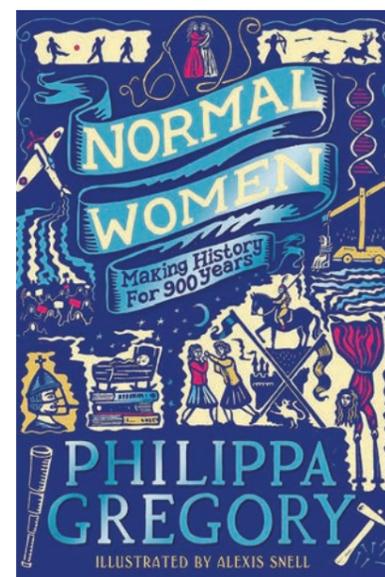
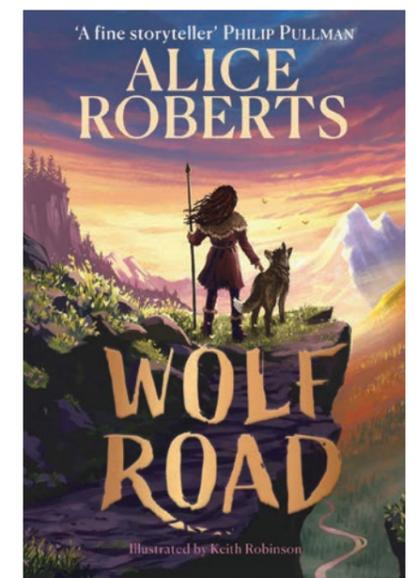
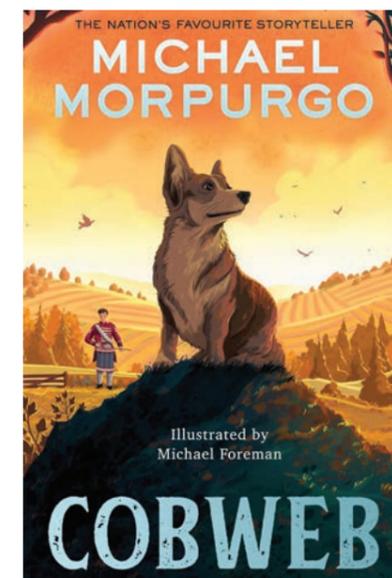
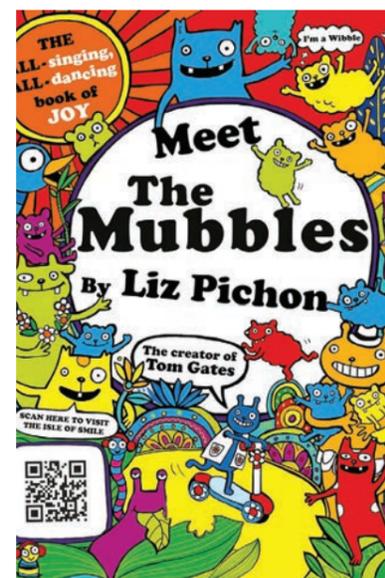
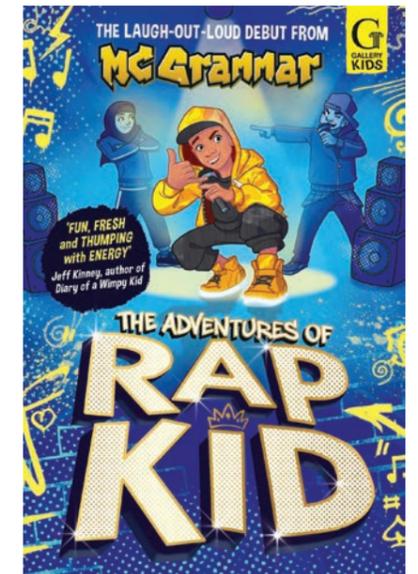
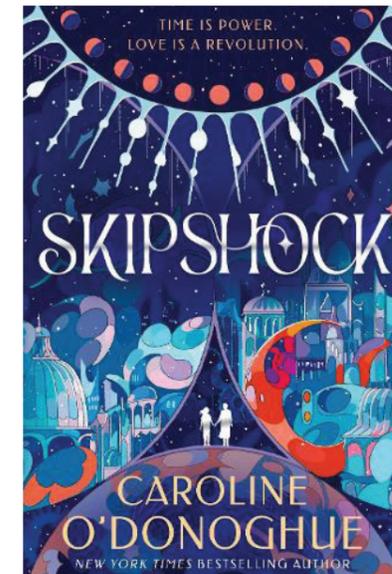
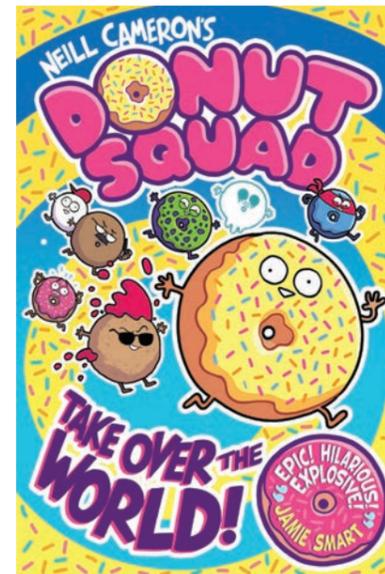
Children & Young People bestsellers

Michael Sheen <i>A Home for Spark the Dragon</i>	1
MC Grammar <i>The Adventures of Rap Kid</i>	2
Julia Donaldson <i>Gozzle</i>	3
Michael Rosen <i>Pocket Shakespeare</i>	=4
Philippa Gregory <i>Normal Women</i>	=4
Katherine Rundell <i>Impossible Creatures</i>	6
Neill Cameron <i>Donut Squad: Take Over the World</i>	7
Hamza Yassin <i>Hamza's Wild World</i>	8
Jacqueline Wilson <i>The Seaside Sleepover</i>	9
Caroline O'Donoghue <i>Skipshock</i>	10



#1 bestseller

Cressida Cowell <i>Doom of the Darkwing</i>	11
Michael Morpurgo <i>Cobweb</i>	12
Alice Roberts <i>Wolf Road</i>	13
Tahereh Mafi <i>Watch Me</i>	14
Pamela Butchart <i>The Great Crisp Robbery</i>	15
Liz Pichon <i>Meet the Mubbles</i>	16
Frank Cottrell-Boyce <i>The Blockbusters</i>	17
Andy Day <i>Dino Dad</i>	18
MG Leonard <i>Hunt for the Golden Scarab</i>	19
Harriet Muncaster <i>Isadora Moon Rides a Bike</i>	20



Education, outreach and widening access

Free Schools Programme

The first two days of Hay Festival 2025 were specially curated days for schools, blending fiction and non-fiction book events and inspiring live performances, offered free to all state schools with support from the Moondance Foundation, Foyle Foundation, Rothschild Foundation and Old Possum's Practical Trust.

In total, 6,725 pupils from across England and Wales attended in person and there were over 2,804 online attendances.

KS2 events on Thursday 22 May included writers **Katherine Rundell**, **Patrice Lawrence**, **Jasbinder Bilan**, **Louie Stowell**, **Jenny Pearson** and **Ross Welford**; poet **Anni Llŷn**; scientists **Jules Howard** and **Ben Garrod**; campaigner **Lily Dyu**; screenwriter and current Waterstones Children's Laureate **Frank Cottrell-Boyce**; teacher and performer **MC Grammar**; and National Poet of Wales **Hanan Issa**.

KS3/4 events on Friday 23 May featured broadcaster and political analyst **Alastair Campbell**; writers **Matt Goodfellow**, **Nicola Davies**, **Anu Adebogun**, **Caroline O'Donoghue**, **Anthony McGowan**, **Liz Hyder**, **Christopher Edge**, and **Ravena Guron**; historians **Alice Roberts** and **Philippa Gregory**; singer-songwriter **Casi Wyn**; and former Children's Laureate Wales **Connor Allen**.

Free Early Years workshops

Hay Festival Education's Early Years project took creative practitioners into schools and brought pupils to Hay Festival 2025 to experience story building and creative expression, delivered with the support of Arts Council England and The Elmley Foundation.

140 KS2 pupils and 207 EYFS pupils from nine schools in Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire attended Hay Festival, 23–24 May. A further 171 Year 1 pupils from Herefordshire and Worcestershire were reached to reflect creatively on their visit to Hay Festival in 2024 and 303 EYFS pupils participated in creative workshops in their schools.

St Thomas Cantilupe Residency

St Thomas Cantilupe School is situated in the centre of Hereford. This is the third consecutive year that Hay Festival has worked with the school as part of a special Hay Festival Communities residency. Following this year's event, five creatives will work with cross-age groups, reception to Year 6: **Sonia Sabri** (choreographer), **Aaron Diaz** (composer), **Alex Wharton** (poet and Children's Laureate Wales), **Sarah Morton** (Artist) and **Toni Cook** (theatre facilitator) to create a promenade performance that will be shared with families, friends and the wider school community.

Free youth group trips

72 vulnerable children and young people and 33 carers from four youth groups across Herefordshire worked with creative practitioners over three sessions before Hay Festival to produce, spoken word, poetry, illustration, projection mapping, stop-motion animation and light graffiti outcomes. Each group visited Hay Festival for a day and enjoyed author events, participated in workshops and met authors. They also used Book Tokens to purchase books from the Festival Bookshop and ate in the Festival food hall, both funded by this project.

These trips were delivered with the support of Arts Council England.

Free library events

Public library venues across the UK hosted free live streaming events to watch Hay Festival 2025 events with the support of the British Library's Living Knowledge Network.

HCA student collaborations

Performing arts students from Hereford College of Arts and the HCA choir performed on several occasions throughout the festival, while Illustration students delivered workshops.

Hay Festival Academy (ages 18–25)

Hay Festival Academy is a skills development and practical apprenticeship programme for young people aged 18–25, supported by The Elmley Foundation. It gives them the opportunity to learn, train and experience in practice how festivals and live events are created and produced from some of the industry's most experienced events practitioners.

All participants not only had access to the core staff team at Hay Festival Hay-on-Wye 2025 but also benefitted from events and meetings with visiting speakers and artists drawn from the festival's programme.

This year we welcomed 36 young people from Wales and across the UK to Hay Festival to join us in Events Management, Broadcast Media, Journalism and Press.

Writers at Work

Our creative development programme for emerging Welsh talent saw 10 artists from across Wales take part in a programmed week of workshops and public events at Hay Festival Hay-on-Wye with the support of Literature Wales and *Folding Rock*, funded by Arts Council Wales. They included: **Rosy Adams**, **DUKE AL**, **Jade E Bradford**, **Gosia Buzzanca**, **Tom Cardew**, **Gemma June Howell**, **Esyllt Lewis**, **Hattie Morrisson**, **Rebecca Thomas** and **Rhys Thomas**.

The Platform

An open call for creatives aged 21–28 to submit new work to be showcased at Hay Festival, The Platform offered new artists the chance to share their work with audiences, plus meet and network with established artists over a three-day visit. It took place with the support of The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust and Martin Smith Foundation.

Our 2025 artists were:

- **Alfiah Jade Brown** – visual poet and producer (London)
- **Alexis Maxwell** – interdisciplinary storyteller (Lancashire)
- **Grace O'Brien** – writer, actor, producer (Rhymney, South Wales)
- **Eden Peppercorn** – writer, theatremaker and visual artist (Nottingham)
- **Safiyah Zanabi** – writer, performer (London)



Green

Sustainability is core to Hay Festival Global, both on stage and in the development of the Festival as an industry-leading charity. This was seen at Hay Festival 2025 in various forms.

Discussion and debate

A sustainability-focused Hay Festival Green series of events ran throughout the 11 days of the Festival, exploring current issues, new developments and technical advances.

Our environment

We continued developing a programme of managing and mitigating the environmental impact of creating a live festival, focusing on energy, waste, transport, procurement and venues. Highlights this year included:

Energy All our mains electricity is provided by Good Energy and is from renewable sources. All of our generators run off HVO bio-fuel from waste vegetable oils and we also use solar-powered remote lighting systems. All site lighting including festoons, sign lights, floods and decorative garden lighting is low-energy LED.

Waste We recycled or composted 75% of the waste produced on site, with the remaining 25% going for waste to energy. This means we are a 'zero-waste to landfill' festival.

Drinking water Water standpipes were available across the site so that audiences could fill their own drinking bottles.

Transport We supplemented the local public transport offer, providing frequent public buses between Hay-on-Wye and the nearest train station in Hereford. This year we offered the service FREE for under 15's and we had a total of 3145 passengers, an increase of 7% on 2024.

Traders Our annual gold Trader and Exhibitor Sustainability Awards went to **Taste of Tibet** and **The Library of Flowers**.





The Festival in the media

Our strategic communications campaign aimed to promote the Festival to the widest possible audience, while emphasising our core charity mission to open access to culture.

Media partnership with the BBC saw 32 shows recorded on site across BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio Wales, BBC Radio Hereford & Worcester and BBC Sounds. Meanwhile, further media partnerships with *Independent*, *The TLS*, *Observer*, *Folding Rock*, *The Bookseller*, *Juno*, *Write On!* and *London Review of Books* reached further.

Wider press coverage across ITV, Times Radio, Press Association, *Guardian*, *the i*, *Metro*, *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Western Mail*, *Evening Standard*, *Brecon & Radnor Express*, *Waitrose Weekend*, *Country Living Magazine*, *The Week*, *Monocle24*, *The Bookseller*, *BookBrunch*, and many more reached wider audiences engage with Festival stories.

On social media, more than 90 million impressions were generated on Festival feeds through the campaign period, up 66% on the previous year. A digital media partnership with TikTok brought 9 creators to the Festival site with content showcased in a special hub on the platform, earning more than 74 million views, formed in close collaboration with our Hay Festival Academy of young journalists.

Marketing distribution saw 20,000 print programmes shared in communities nationwide via 540 distribution channels, including bookshops, libraries, supermarkets and cultural centres. Strategic partnerships were developed to reach key audience groups, including collaborations with the Welsh Sports Association, The Reading Agency, Bookshop.org, Great Western Railway, Aubin, Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, Hereford College of Arts, Hay Castle, and more.

The Festival in quotes

“One of my favourite places on earth... Besides the fun and joy of gathering to share stories, it is also the antidote to disinformation and division. There is space for everyone in this carnival of ideas.”

Stephen Fry
Actor, author and Hay Festival Global president

“I truly love going to Hay Festival. It’s got an atmosphere all its own – and how marvellous that book lovers can browse happily between author events in such a magical town of books.”

Jacqueline Wilson

“For a Welsh writer there is no more exciting place to be than with audiences at Hay Festival. The chance to meet readers and make new friends in such a wonderful town is brilliant. For writers and readers alike, it’s like coming home.”

Gwyneth Lewis

“Events like Hay Festival are a concentrated dose of knowledge, inspiration, conversation, laughter, and hope... The writers I’ve met through programmes like Hay Festival Writers at Work help me to keep going despite personal challenges, and the general difficulties of writing as a career choice.”

Jade E. Bradford
Hay Festival Writers at Work participant

“Our Hay Festival experience this year was as superb as ever – the festival is so inclusive and welcoming for our pupils, who come from incredibly diverse backgrounds. Most have never been to any sort of literature festival before and this is such a transformative event for them! This year was particularly special, as one of our pupils was invited on stage with Alastair Campbell to deliver a speech on her political opinions! These opportunities are truly life-changing – thanks again for providing us with these amazing experiences!”

Khudeza Siddika
Head of English, Bishop Vaughan School

“Visits to the [Hay Festival] Programme for Schools are a superb way of developing cultural capital. There is no better way of developing a love of reading than by visiting the Hay Festival.”

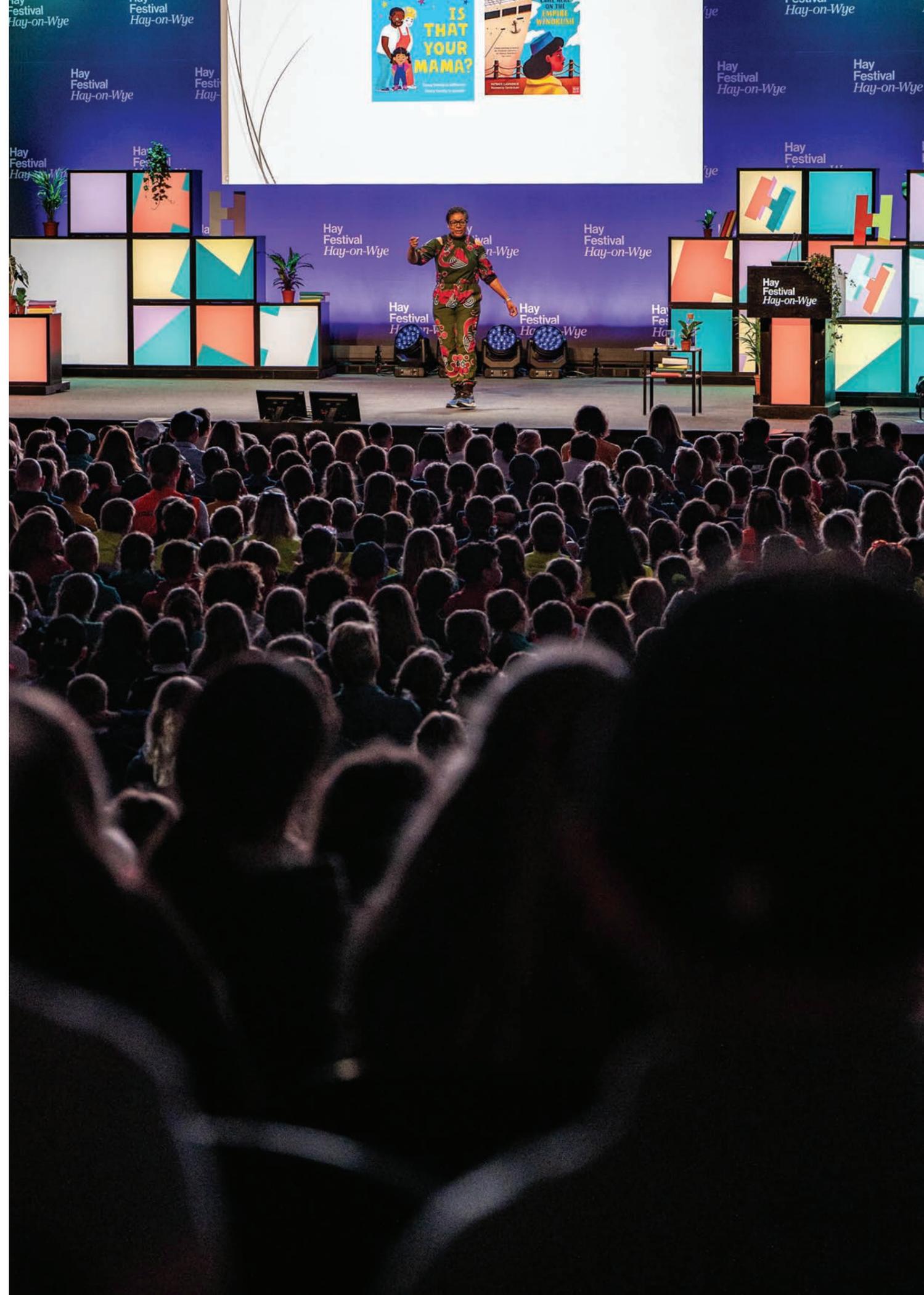
Andrew Farrell
Assistant Headteacher, Harborne Academy

“Awesome day, I’m definitely coming again and can’t wait for the next one! Hay Festival is the place of amazing memories.”

Pupil comment
Crickhowell High School

“Having heard someone who looks like me on stage, I believe I could write a book to encourage people from my background to write.”

Pupil comment
Pen to Print





Our funding

Hay Festival Hay-on-Wye is run by Hay Festival Global, a registered charity (1070073) based in Hay-on-Wye, Wales. Our mission is to create open and accessible platforms for the free exchange of ideas.

We rely on a mixed-funding model that includes sponsorship, grant funding, ticket revenue, memberships, and donations, operating under the Charity Commission's rules and ethical guidance. This model of funding enables us to produce impactful events that open access to culture, while running growing outreach and education platforms to support.

In addition to this, we are grateful for the significant goodwill that makes each Festival project possible, from our dedicated volunteers to our partners offering in-kind support.



With thanks

Warm thanks from the Hay Festival Foundation Ltd Board and team to our partners and supporters.

The continued partnership of Literature Wales and funding from Arts Council Wales towards our Writers at Work programme, enabled us to offer 10 writers from Wales a unique professional development opportunity.

Arts Council England's (ACE) and The Elmley Foundation's support allowed us to continue to work with Early Years children from Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire and engage young people who otherwise might not be able to attend the Festival. The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust and Martin Smith Foundation also provided support for The Platform, an initiative for young, emerging artists aged between 21 and 28 to showcase and share their work. A consortium of trusts and foundations provided vital support to our schools programme.

Our media partners – BBC, *Independent*, *Observer*, *The TLS*, *LRB*, *Folding Rock*, *Juno*, TikTok and *The Bookseller* – allowed our programme to reach further than ever before.

The Festival has a global reach and we were delighted to receive support from a diverse range of international partners, including the British Council, The Eccles Institute for the Americas & Oceania at the British Library, Open Society Foundations, Acción Cultural Española (AC/E), Instituto Cervantes, the Polish Cultural Institute London and the Embassy of Colombia.

Our Project Partners including Black British Book Festival, Bannau Brycheiniog, the Hawthornden Foundation, Institute for Human Sciences, National Trust, Nature, The British Academy, The Rivers Trust and The Royal Society brought added depth to the programme of activities.

Many businesses support, sponsor and exhibit at the Festival each year: our huge thanks to all of them for their support – particularly new sponsors Intravel and Bute Energy – for their encouragement and backing, which helps bring a truly eclectic flavour to the 11 days of the Festival, and creates a very special sense of place.

Lastly, a huge thank you to all of our audiences, artists and Members, Patrons, Benefactors and Chair's Circle. We are forever grateful for all their kind and extremely generous support.



A big thank you

Sponsors & Partners

Funders



Global Partners



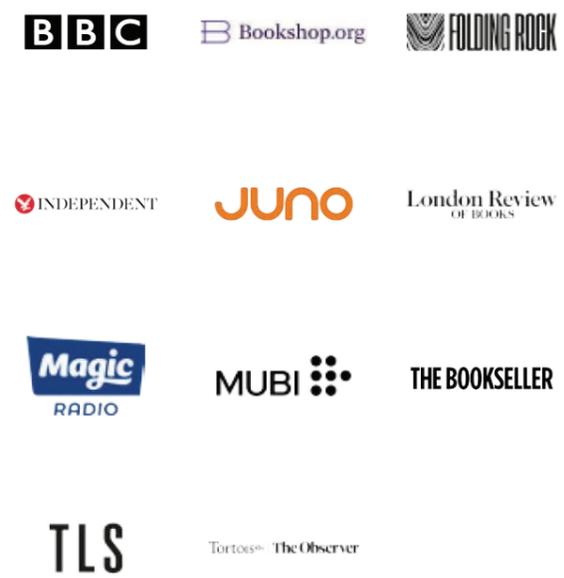
Project Partners



Education Partners



Media Partners





Hay Festival Global

Hay Festival Global is a charity providing global festivals of stories, ideas and new possibilities.

The antidote to polarisation, we bring together diverse voices to listen, talk, debate and create, tackling some of the biggest political, social and environmental challenges of our time. Through one-of-a-kind festivals, in unique locations around the world – plus forums, digital platforms and learning programmes – Hay Festival Global celebrates and inspires different views, perspectives and points of view.

In 1987, Hay Festival Global was dreamt up in the booktown of Hay-on-Wye, Wales. Thirty-eight years later, the charity runs events and projects all over the world, from the historic town of Cartagena in Colombia to the heart of cities in Peru, Mexico, Spain and the USA.

Hay Festival Global reaches an audience of millions each year and continues to grow and innovate, earning multiple awards over the years, including Festival of Sanctuary status from refugee charity City of Sanctuary UK and, in 2020, Spain's Princess of Asturias Award in Communication and Humanities.

Coming up...

- Nairobi Litfest, Kenya**
26–29 June 2025
- Hay Festival Querétaro, Mexico**
4–7 September 2025
- Hay Festival Segovia, Spain**
11–14 September 2025
- Lviv BookForum, Ukraine**
2–5 October 2025
- Hay Festival Forum Dallas, USA**
17–19 October 2025
- Hay Festival Arequipa, Peru**
6–9 November 2025
- Hay Festival Winter Weekend, UK**
27–30 November 2025
- Hay Festival Jericó, Colombia**
23–25 January 2026
- Hay Festival Forum Panama City, Panama**
27–28 January 2026
- Hay Festival Forum Medellín, Colombia**
27–28 January 2026
- Hay Festival Cartagena, Colombia**
29 January–1 February 2026
- Hay Festival Forum Seville, Spain**
February 2026
- Hay Festival Hay-on-Wye, UK**
21–31 May 2026.

Discover a world of different

ideas

books

perspectives

debates

views

dance

workshops

art

thinking

music

comedy

voices

possibilities

walks

poetry

Hay Festival Global
The Drill Hall
25 Lion St
Hay-on-Wye
HR3 5AD

admin@hayfestival.org
+44 1497 822 620

Registered Charity 1070073
Registered Company 03490480
Registered in England and Wales
Vat No GB 291 8222 93

hayfestival.org/hay-on-wye