



By Rae Hoole (Independent Evaluator) July 2020

Contents

1. **Project Summary**
2. **Objectives**
3. **Evaluation Framework**
4. **Activity**
 - 4.1 Research and Rehearsal
 - 4.2 Performance
 - 4.3 Marketing
 - 4.4 Legacy
5. **Expenditure Report**
6. **Summary of Evaluation Data**
 - 6.1 Questionnaires
 - 6.2 Audience Feedback
 - 6.3 Feedback from Health Professionals and Partners
 - 6.4 Analysis of Ticketing Data
7. **Conclusion**

1. Project Summary

Four of Swords' new creation, *Doctor Dracula*, is a spectacular site-specific theatre piece which explores the symbolic role of blood in mythology, religion, and literature, and how that contrasts with a cutting edge understanding of blood in the 21st Century. It was conceived to be initially performed in the house and gardens of Knightshayes Court, a National Trust property in Devon. Research for the script involved consultations with patients of a variety of blood conditions, as well as drawing heavily on the knowledge of Dr Luke Pilling and Professor Nick Groom: academics at Exeter University and experts in genetic research and Gothic literature respectively.

2. Objectives

Short-Term Objectives

- To consult with patients of a variety of different blood conditions, to feed their experiences directly into the writing and development of an immersive theatre piece.
- To create an immersive theatrical experience for approximately 2,000 people of diverse backgrounds which demonstrates the advancement of blood-science through the ages, and which demystifies certain blood conditions, especially haemochromatosis (drawing on the research of Dr Pilling).

Longer-Term Objectives

- To promote engagement with scientific research studies and blood donation.
- To encourage people to be tested for rare blood conditions such as haemochromatosis.
- To feed back into the research of Dr Pilling, improving health research by making it more people-centred.

3. Evaluation Framework

The following Evaluation Framework was devised in collaboration with Dr Lewis Winks, Impact and Partnership Development Officer at Exeter University. It attempts to gauge the success of the project in relation to its initial, stated objectives. The Evaluation Framework comprised:

- Questionnaires - distributed both as a hard copy included with the programme at performances, and also available online with Survey Monkey. The questionnaire posed the following questions:
 - Have you previously given blood as a NHS donor?
 - Are you a regular donor?
 - Have you signed up to give blood following a *Doctor Dracula* performance?

- Has your knowledge of blood conditions improved as a result of watching *Doctor Dracula*?
- Audience feedback – captured as videos and written testimonials
- Feedback from health professionals
- Analysis of ticketing data

4. Activity

4.1 Research and Rehearsal

Four of Swords set out to create an immersive theatre production based on an original story. The central plot idea was to use the eternal life of a vampire as a way of transporting the audience through different time periods. In each time period, the contemporary understanding of blood would inform the action and drive the story. Principle writer Philip Kingslan John was also keen to create an anthology of classic vampiric characters and moments from different literary works. It would further draw on the testimony of patient volunteers who had real life experience of blood conditions.

Philip began his research in earnest in June 2019. He immersed himself in vampiric literature from the Gothic era, and drew particular inspiration from:

- 'Fragment of a Novel' by George Gordon Lord Byron, 1819.
- *The Vampyre* by John Polidori, 1819.
- *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan LeFanu, 1872.
- *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, 1897.
- 'Dracula's Guest' by Bram Stoker, 1914.

He was also guided and inspired by Professor Nick Groom, expert in Gothic literature at Exeter University. Professor Groom's research for his book *The Vampire: A New History* (Yale University Press, 2018) was instrumental in creating the C18th and C19th parts of the story: the folk traditions and superstitions of the 1700s contrasting with the burgeoning medical understanding of the Victorian age.

The futuristic section of the story was intended to illustrate the potential for future improvements in blood analysis, as well as highlighting the rare blood condition haemochromatosis. This part of the story was developed with the help of Dr Luke Pilling from the Epidemiology & Public Health Group at University of Exeter. Dr Pilling's paper on haemochromatosis was published in the British Medical Journal in early 2019. He also assisted in organising the consultations with patients of a variety of rare blood conditions, including haemochromatosis, and also haemophilia and pernicious anaemia.

In July, whilst the research and writing of *Doctor Dracula* was ongoing, construction began on three set-pieces.

- Graveyard for the C17th section – including exploding coffin
- Blood transfusion machine for the Gothic section
- Console and screens for the futuristic section

As detailed in the interim project report, the construction of these pieces was not entirely successful. Nonetheless, they worked well as visually compelling focal points for each part of the story.

Rehearsals started in September 2019, and were held primarily at Forkbeard Fantasy's workshop, Waterslade Studios, near Tiverton, Devon.

4.2 Performance

Four of Swords performed *Doctor Dracula* from 23rd October to the 2nd November 2019 at Knightshayes Court, selling 638 tickets (88%). Four of Swords drew on all of their experience in immersive storytelling (*Macbeth*, *Medea*, *Frankenstein*, *Faustus*) to create a refreshingly original presentation. They surrounded their 'guests' with characters, installations and music to inform an unforgettable learning experience. The complexities of the information about blood conditions such as haemochromatosis and the concept of epigenetics were made more accessible through this intimate and emotive style of theatre.

Before each performance, the audience holding area was turned into an exhibition space. Information boards were created in consultation with Professor Groom. Representatives from *Haemochromatosis UK* and the *Exeter 10,000* research project chatted to audience members, demonstrated some gadgets, distributed flyers, and signed people up. Publicity was also featured for Exeter Leukaemia Fund.

The company had planned to perform at two other South West locations: Tavistock's neo-Gothic Town Hall, and at a Cornish venue in Launceston or Bodmin. Tavistock could not go ahead due to the main contact going on long term sick and leaving no one to liaise with on leaving. Enthusiastic partnership support from Ashton Court in Bristol informed the decision to substitute this venue for the unconfirmed Cornwall venue. Instead of the Tavistock performances, Four of Swords chose to use the time to rewrite and make improvements to the show. This decision was detailed in their interim project report.

Four of Swords were therefore booked to perform again at Ashton Court in Bristol from 18th to 28th March 2020. However, work at Ashton Court was cut short due to COVID-19. Four of Swords were compelled to change their plans at the last minute. This was done in consultation with Grants Adviser Natasha Wright. Instead of holding public performances, Four of Swords took the opportunity to film as much of the play as they could, on location at Ashton Court.

When Lockdown happened all of the creative team had to return home and contracts were terminated. Philip Kingslan John continued to edit all existing footage throughout Lockdown (see **4.4 Legacy**, below.)

4.3 Marketing

Four of Swords secured the services of Phil Goodwin, Press and Media Officer of the Northcott Theatre, to publicise and promote the project, as well as their usual photographer Matt Austin. Matt created an exceptional series of images which were widely printed in the local press, including in *Devon Life* and *The Express & Echo*.

Four of Swords promoted the Knightshayes performances through their website and by direct mailing an existing network of loyal supporters. National Trust networks

were also utilised with shows advertised on the Knightshayes website, the National Trust newsletter, and National Trust magazine.

The company successfully attracted an interview with BBC Radio Devon, and a television spot on BBC South West's news channel, Spotlight. The television spot can be watched on the company's YouTube channel:

<https://youtu.be/GeZLyHv8Cw>

In collaboration with partner and academic consultant Professor Nick Groom, Four of Swords wrote, filmed and released a series of promotional videos which can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAam095NOyCIQxfZxkK476kqzNpPxrgmt>

A review of the show appeared in Exeter University's Arts and Lifestyle magazine, RAZZ:

https://razzmag.com/2019/10/27/review-dr-dracula-knightshayes-tiverton/?fbclid=IwAR3nY6MYvKYEUON1-rNzm7-r7zgj6Ef6L0wWeaAPufWkTujBKYEZ82_qNes

A short trailer was made to advertise the Bristol Shows. These unfortunately had to be cancelled but extracts from this film is incorporated into the new documentary described in **4.4 Legacy**, below.

4.4 Legacy

Project producer Sarah White and director Philip Kingslan John are working on a film charting the process of creating *Doctor Dracula*. The first draft of this film will be sent to Wellcome to accompany this Evaluation Report. The final film will be published shortly on the Four of Swords website, and also screened as a trailer at open-air screenings of *Nosferatu*: Four of Swords' new project for Spring and Summer 2021. The intention is that the film might also be screened more widely and used as a catalyst for further discussion between patients, academics, health professionals, and students. Partner support for this new venture is coming from *The Bluebirds* (Somerset-based theatre group) and *Exeter Phoenix* arts centre.

Four of Swords consulted with Professor Groom and Ann Grand of the The Wellcome Centre at Exeter University for advice about securing future venues. Four of Swords have opened conversations with a variety of potential venue partners for future performances of *Doctor Dracula*: Wells Cathedral, Arnos Vale Cemetery (Bristol), the London Library, the Alverton Hotel (Truro) and Pendennis Castle (Falmouth).

5. Expenditure Report

5.1 Summaries of Income and Expenditure

Summary of Income		
	Budget (£)	Actual (£)
Wellcome Trust	69,706	69,706
Ticket sales	20,000	7,189
TOTAL	89,706	76,895

Originally the project was due to be performed at three venues across the South West. The income budget was based on selling 65% of tickets at each venue. Performances at National Trust Knightshays in November sold 88% of tickets. However due to COVID-19 all other performances had to be cancelled, leaving a deficit between the Budget and Actual figure of the ticket sales income line.

Summary of Expenditure		
	Budget (£)	Actual (£)
Salaries / Stipends	0	0
Fees	63,006	56,248
Materials and consumables	6,000	5,685
Equipment	3,000	2,729
Production costs, press & marketing	7,700	7,194
Travel and subsistence	0	2,497
Evaluation and dissemination	8,000	2,540
Building and refurbishment	0	0
Miscellaneous other	0	0
Contingency	2,000	0
TOTAL	89,706	76,893

As explained above, the loss in revenue from cancelling public performances meant that we had to rethink what we could achieve with the remaining budget whilst still committing to the original aims and objectives of the project and honouring contracts we had in place with performers and freelancers. Changes to the different areas of the budget are explained below.

5.2 Breakdown

Fees	
We were able to reduce fee expenditure due to the fact that performance weeks were cancelled therefore not requiring personnel for those weeks.	
12 performers x 9 weeks	47,480
Director	880
Vocal coach	180
Producer	1,000
Writer	1,290
Sound engineer	1,000
Technical crew / Stage Manager	2,898
Designer	1,520
SUBTOTAL	56,248
Materials & Consumables	
All materials for costumes, props and set installations	5,685
SUBTOTAL	5,685
Equipment	
Hiring & purchase of all technical equipment for performances	2,729
SUBTOTAL	2,729
Production Costs, Press & Marketing	
We were able to reduce fee expenditure due to the fact that performance weeks were cancelled therefore not requiring personnel for those weeks.	
Rehearsal space	1,460
Set pieces build	2,937
PR Agency	500
Press photography, filming of performances and associated marketing/info films	1,144
Van hire	276
Printing of scripts, programs and marketing info (additional support given in kind by Exeter University)	677
Patient liaison sessions to inform writing, x5 patients at £40 (many others spoke to us and offered their time for free)	200
SUBTOTAL	7,194

Travel & Subsistence	
We used the money in our Contingency budget line to pay travel and subsistence to the cast and crew when we moved to Bristol in order to ensure that we could film as much as possible before lockdown	2,497
SUBTOTAL	2,497

Production Costs, Press & Marketing	
When we were awarded our grant, Wellcome advised us to use some of the budgeted £8,000 in other areas where it might have greater impact	
External evaluator	500
Film postproduction & editing	1,000
Assistant producer	790
Accountant	250
SUBTOTAL	2,540

TOTAL	76,893
--------------	---------------

6. Summary of Evaluation Data

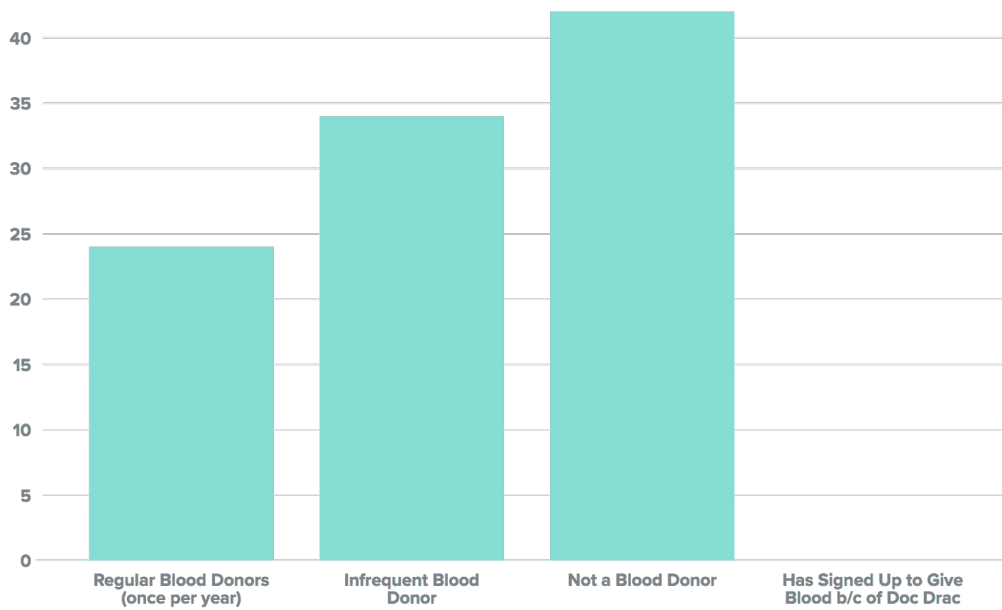
6.1 Questionnaires

Knightshayes performances sold out to 88% capacity. Audiences were encouraged to take part in a questionnaire after each performance. Hardcopies were distributed, and the survey was also hosted online at SurveyMonkey. However, the number of audience members who participated in this survey was disappointingly low. The structure of the show was such that, at the end of the play, the audience members were outside the property in the cold, and there was no useful “debriefing” area. Furthermore, once home from a night out, audience members cannot easily be contacted.

Four of Swords are addressing this shortfall for their next production; they will set up online communication between the company and audience members at the outset (when tickets are purchased) and maintain a ‘relationship’ until after the show when feedback will be requested.

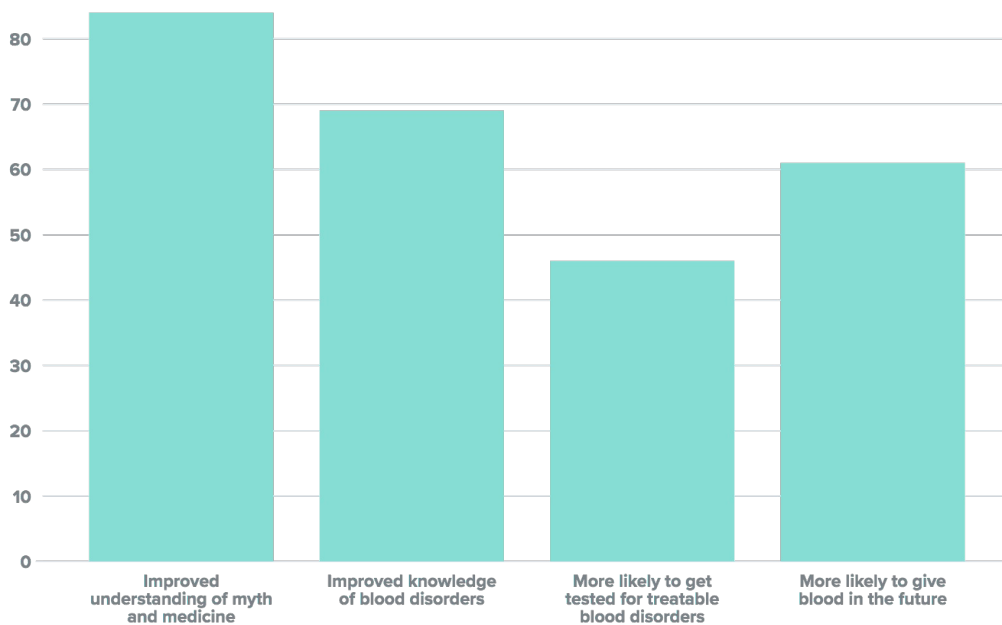
Twenty-six questionnaires were submitted. The results are analysed below.

Are you a blood donor with NHS Give Blood? (%)



Over half of respondents had experience of giving blood; this contrasts with a national average of approximately 2%. Perhaps the Four of Swords audience is more medically literate than average, although it is difficult to judge with such a small data set. In terms of a target audience for inspiring people to give blood, the 34% of lapsed or irregular blood donors seems prime territory.

More Questionnaire Results (%)



It's disappointing that no one signed up to donate blood directly as a result of the show. This is understandable, however, seeing as no representatives from NHS Give Blood were able to attend. Nonetheless it is heartening that a majority of respondents indicated that they were more likely to donate as a result of attending *Doctor Dracula*. The other questions from this part of the survey suggest that although the play was successful at exploring the relationship between myth and medicine, and successful at raising awareness of blood disorders, the message of needing to be tested and the importance of early testing were not so efficiently communicated.

6.2 Audience Feedback

"An exceptional piece which fully immerses us in the pain of love, disease and living. *Doctor Dracula* guarantees we won't forget the importance of blood any time soon." *Katrina Bennett, Razz Magazine*

"Enjoyed this so much, it was awesome! Honestly was blown away by the last scene outside in the Gardens." *Audience member*

"Marvellously creepy. Drawing attention to blood disorders didn't detract from the sensual atmosphere which was helped by its wonderful setting. The clever new plot was both funny and informative and the new collaboration with a healthcare organisation was handled well." *Audience member*

I thought it was a really good immersive piece. I really like how they constantly refer to you. Really makes you feel a part of it." *Audience member*

"I thought it was really good. I loved how they really involved everyone, and made you feel a part of it, and how it affected you physically and mentally, that was really cool. I thought it was very interesting how they were able to link the vampire and the science bits together, and create a drama piece out of and based around the blood." *Audience member*

"I thought the visuals were amazing. I liked the bit at the end with the flaming torches." *Audience member*

"Really enjoyed it. This is the third Four of Swords performance I've been to. They're all fantastic. Before tonight, I didn't know about haemochromatosis, I knew about haemophilia but not that one. I'm keen to find out more about it." *Audience member*

"I thought it was really atmospheric. I thought it was brilliant. The actors were fabulous. I thought the best part was when they were involving the audience. And it is good that they actually did link it to a serious illness that I didn't know about." *Audience member*

"It was just amazing, I'm overwhelmed, it was a perfect venue, perfect cast, it was just perfect. No words, just amazing. I am actually a blood donor, so I did know a bit about the blood condition, but it's really good that they're doing this so people can be made more aware of it." *Audience member*

6.3 Feedback from Health Professionals and Partners

Feedback from Consultant Academics

“Doctor Dracula was a stunning production. Four of Swords were on thrilling form. Absolutely spine-chilling immersive theatre.” *Professor Nick Groom*

“I enjoyed the project, it gave me plenty of opportunities to discuss and think about my work from very different perspectives. This included of course speaking directly to individuals with several different blood disorders, but also explaining the links to audience members, who were very receptive to discussions. Discussions with Four of Swords' writers and Prof Groom regarding rejuvenation and synthetic blood were very thought provoking, and inspired me to do some reading into it.” *Dr Luke Pilling*

Feedback from *Haemochromatosis UK*

The partnership with *Haemochromatosis UK* and the Exeter 10,000 Project meant banners were displayed and flyers were distributed at performances by representatives who met with audience members prior to each performance.

Correspondence with Neil McClements (CEO of *Haemochromatosis UK*) was very positive. He was supportive and “loved to help”. The representatives from *Haemochromatosis UK* very much enjoyed speaking to so many interested people.

Feedback from the *Exeter 10,000 Project*

“The research team had a great time talking to people about the work being done by the NIHR Exeter CRF, and signposting ways to get involved. Being able to share video clips of red blood cells travelling through the smallest blood vessels in humans was a particularly highlight. Thirty people have signed up to Exeter 10,000 to date. We may gain a few more over time as a number of people took leaflets away with them. The play itself was fabulous, linking past myths to our current medical understanding, combining art and entertainment as well as education about blood disorders.”

Feedback from the *National Trust*

“For the team at Knightshayes, it was a pleasure hosting Four of Swords over two weeks last as they performed their production of Doctor Dracula. The feedback has been brilliant. Seeing the show brought to life in such an engaging and enriching way, and seeing people enjoy Knightshayes who might otherwise never have visited us was wonderful. Four of Swords were great to work with, taking on board all our feedback and meeting head on the challenges of interactive theatre in a sensitive heritage environment. They worked with us to make the most of what we had to offer, whilst mitigating the impact of something other properties might find challenging to host. Likewise, it was a brilliant exercise for us, testing our boundaries of what we can offer in the house and gardens here, challenging us to work in new ways and to be as dynamic as we possibly can be.” *Alice Morgan-Brown, Visitor Experience Manager*

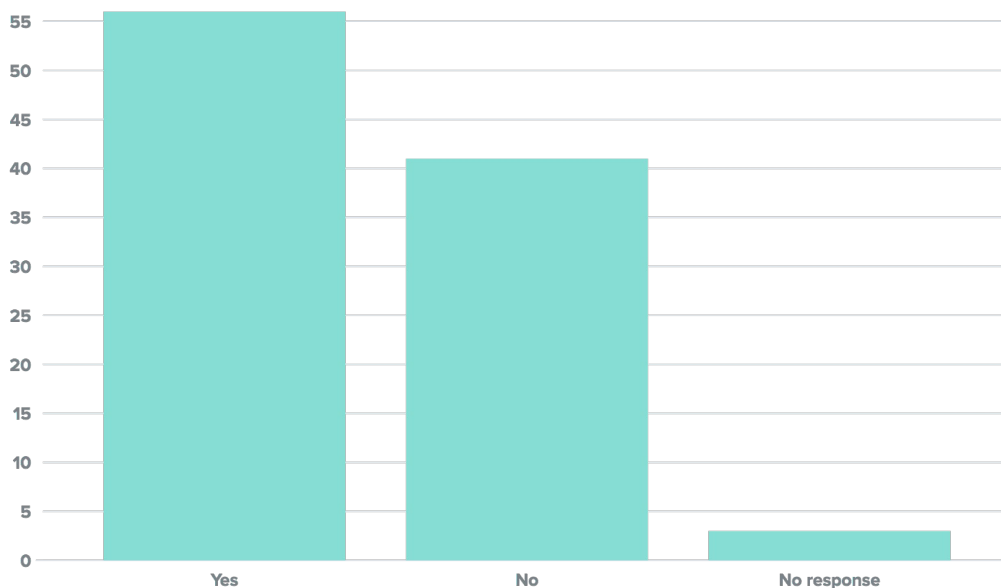
Other Partnerships

The partnership with NHS Give Blood, despite the best efforts of Four of Swords and Dr Pilling, was not forthcoming. NHS Give Blood was unable to send a representative to the shows, or any publicity. Four of Swords was however able to celebrate their cause in the message of the play (lamenting the collapse of the service in the dystopian future segment of the narrative), and featured their details prominently in the programme. Dr Pilling did finally make contact with NHS Give Blood and they had promised some practical support for the Bristol shows, which sadly never happened. Dr Pilling was also in discussions with Andrew Trehearne from *UK Biobank* about the Bristol show, who was keen to promote his research into blood-related diseases through *Doctor Dracula*.

6.4 Analysis of Ticketing Data

638 tickets sold = 88% of tickets available = 251 transactions. As often happens, sales were relatively slow in the first week and picked up considerably in the second. People who bought tickets online were asked the following questions:

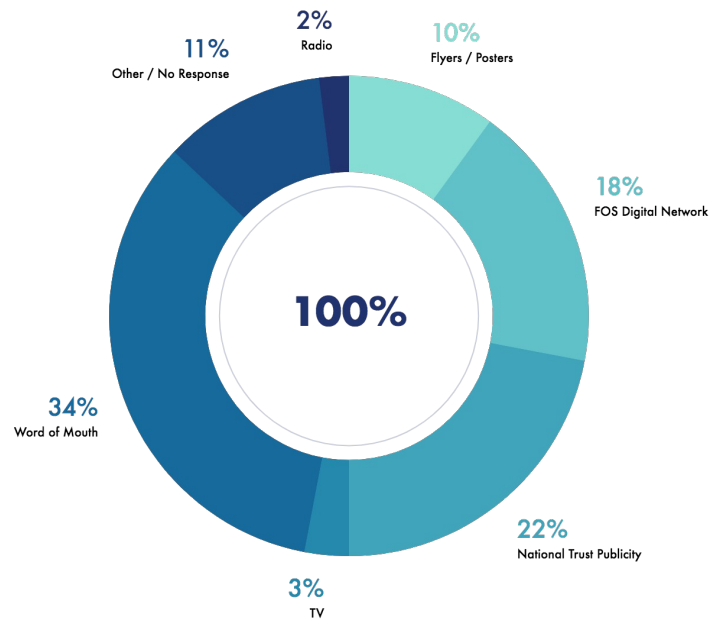
Have you been to a Four of Swords show before? (%)



This is in line with previous Four of Swords productions. It's slightly disappointing to think that the majority of tickets are sold in the second week, but that many of the buyers must already know Four of Swords' work and may even be their fans. In future, perhaps the company could offer some incentive to existing fans to book the earlier shows, in order to free up tickets for the second week.

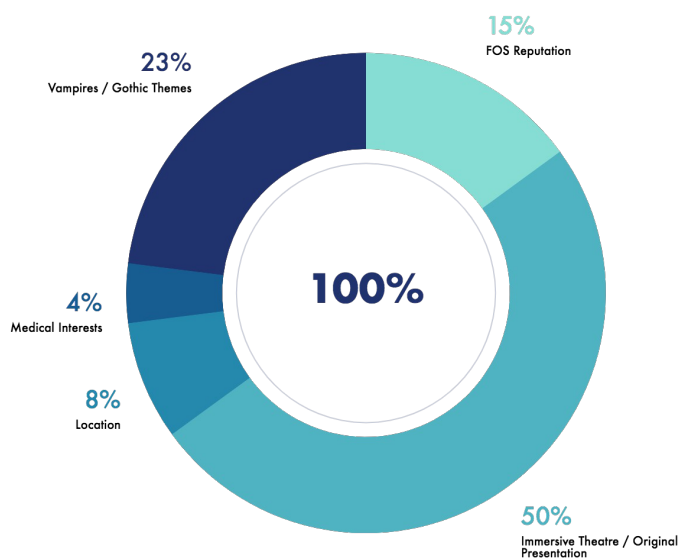
In the second graph “**How did you hear about the show?**”, featured below, the small impact of TV and Radio is surprising, as is the massive importance of word of mouth. Having excellent photographs ready in time to take advantage of the National Trust's magazine and newsletters was clearly effective. Again, there is a difference

How did you hear about the show? (%)



between the smaller showing of Four of Swords' Digital Network here and the overwhelming 56% of audience members who have been to previous Four of Swords shows. This suggests that the company might not be communicating most effectively with their established fans.

What attracted you to the show? (%)



The final graph “**What attracted you to the show?**” offers satisfying proof that there is a healthy appetite for fresh, innovative theatrical presentations. Four of Swords has always prized itself on creating unique and singularly compelling, immersive shows. Interestingly, only 4% of ticket purchasers specified medical interests. This suggests that the marketing of the show to medical professionals might have been improved.

7. Conclusion

Four of Swords took on an ambitious project in *Doctor Dracula* and delivered it with style. They stepped into uncharted territory and in doing so they have enabled new and surprising partnerships across different sectors: arts, science, heritage, public and private health care and academia. Their ingenuity and determination drove the project forward until the unprecedented COVID-19 brought it to a halt.

Through the project, people from a wide range of backgrounds have experienced close up intimate theatre in an inspirational setting. The original interpretation of the Gothic vampire has enabled audiences to discover new and interesting facts about blood-science through the ages.

Four of Swords Director Reflects on the Project

“It has been an honour to receive The Wellcome Trust's support on the *Doctor Dracula* project. This has been by far the largest project that we have undertaken with Four of Swords. On this project I was the principle writer and director. The research part of the project was especially rewarding and fascinating. I feel extremely privileged to have worked so closely with Professor Groom and Dr Pilling, and hearing the stories from our patient consultations was very special. Honouring their experiences and weaving them through our story was a challenge, but one that I feel we delivered on.

“In terms of our initial objectives, I am very proud of the multi-faceted show that we created. It's a shame that we didn't manage to perform it to as many people as we originally intended, but the show exists now and hopefully, once the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided, we will be able to follow up on the conversations we have opened with a number of potential future venues in order to perform the show again. I am also pleased that we will be able to screen the film of *Doctor Dracula* as part our next project, a live rescoring of the classic vampire film *Nosferatu*. We will therefore be able to continue to raise awareness of haemochromatosis, and promote involvement in medical research and blood donation.”

Philip Kingslan John, co-Artistic Director, Four of Swords