

Britain's Ocean City brand perception research

Final report

3 October 2022

Contents

Introduction	Page 3
What we learned	Page 3
What we do next	Page 5
Conclusion	Page 9
Appendix 1	Page 10
Appendix 2	Page 12
Appendix 3	Page 14
Appendix 4	Page 18

Introduction

The aim of the project was to understand current perceptions of the Britain's Ocean City (BOC) brand. To do this we interviewed 33 stakeholders, ran four focus groups and distributed two email surveys. The information gathered through this activity is summarised in this report.

This report is divided into two sections:

- What we learned
- What to do next

Additional information has been included in the appendices.

What we learned

Our research identified three significant themes, which are influencing perceptions of the BOC brand.

- Visibility
- Experience
- Narrative

Visibility

Where and how people see the brand is influencing their perception. These are the three key elements influencing the visibility of the BOC brand:

- Hierarchy
- Ownership
- Brand identity

Key points to note

- **Hierarchy**

The brands below are considered most prominent in the city. To be more visible, the BOC brand will need to compete with them.



• **Ownership**

The BOC brand is considered an asset of Plymouth City Council, so the majority of organisations outside the Council don't consider using it. As one stakeholder commented, "We wouldn't use somebody else's brand."

For some organisations, an association with the BOC brand would undermine perceptions of their own brand, so they wouldn't use it.

Experience

The experience people have of the brand is influencing their perception. These are the three key elements influencing the experience of the BOC brand.

- Impact
- Meaning
- Physical experience

Key points to note

• **Impact**

To be considered "relevant", the BOC brand needs to make an impact. What this impact needs to be, will vary for each audience category identified in the project brief: residents, businesses, visitors, students.

To create a "positive experience" of the BOC brand, you need to understand what that impact is.

• **Meaning**

The BOC brand lacks meaning. Stakeholders questioned what it stood for. One described it as "just a strapline". Where it has meaning is in the tourism sector. One stakeholder commented, "When you stand on the Hoe, it all makes sense".

But this statement raises the question: Does the BOC brand still make sense if you're living in a lower income area of the city, with no access to the waterfront?

Narrative

People are unsure what the message is behind the brand. These are the three key elements influencing the narrative of the BOC brand.

- The past
- The present
- The future

Key points to note

• **The past**

Stakeholders felt that there are many cities in the UK that have a maritime heritage. What makes Plymouth THE ocean city? This was a view reflected by the resident and student focus groups.

- **The present**

For the BOC brand to be relevant, it needs to articulate the opportunities it can create for each audience category.

- **The future**

Plymouth is home to world class research, engineering and innovation. But this is more often recognised outside the city, than by the people who live in it. Raising awareness of the city's world class credentials will change perceptions. Residents and students didn't feel Plymouth competes on a "global scale".

When developing the narrative, there are three perspectives that need to be considered:

City = How does the city see itself?

This is built around civic pride and the opportunities available to residents, students and businesses based in the city.

National = How does the UK see the city?

This is built around giving the city credibility on a national scale: "Why is Plymouth Britain's Ocean City? Because..."

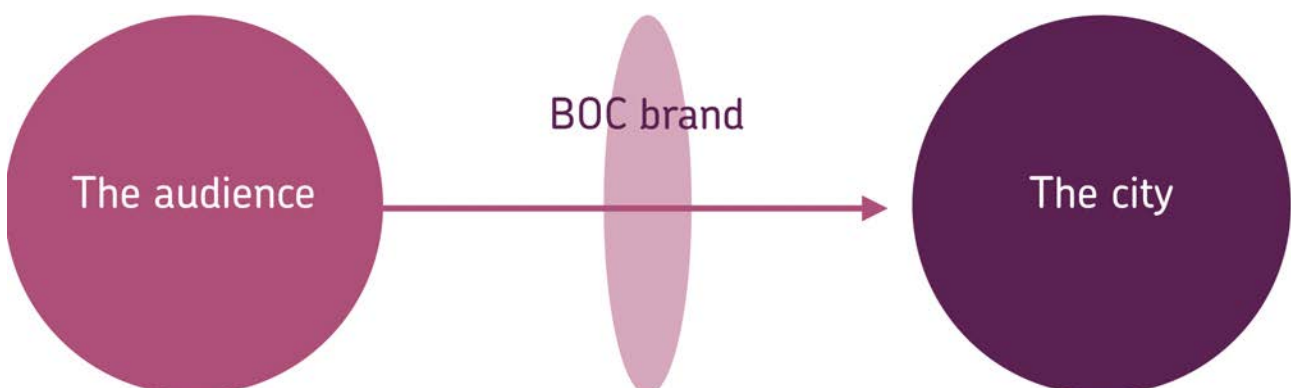
International = How does the world see the city?

Plymouth has world-class assets. There is recognition that, in some aspects, it could be compared to California or Sydney, but currently it isn't.

What we do next

With the brand research complete, it is possible to begin to develop the brand strategy. The role of the brand strategy is to influence what people think about Plymouth.

To do this, the BOC brand needs to act as a "lens", influencing how people see the city - and the opportunities it offers them. The brand strategy will allow the BOC brand to bring a clear, consistent narrative to the city.



Brand strategy: the process

The development of the brand strategy is divided into three stages:

- Engage
- Create
- Deliver

Engage

There are two objectives for the engagement activity: Deliver feedback and gather insight. To do this we will run a series of workshops, with organisations that participated in the research.

We will provide feedback on the research, explaining what people think of the BOC brand. Gathering insight will help us to understand what the BOC brand needs to deliver to organisations, in order to be considered relevant.

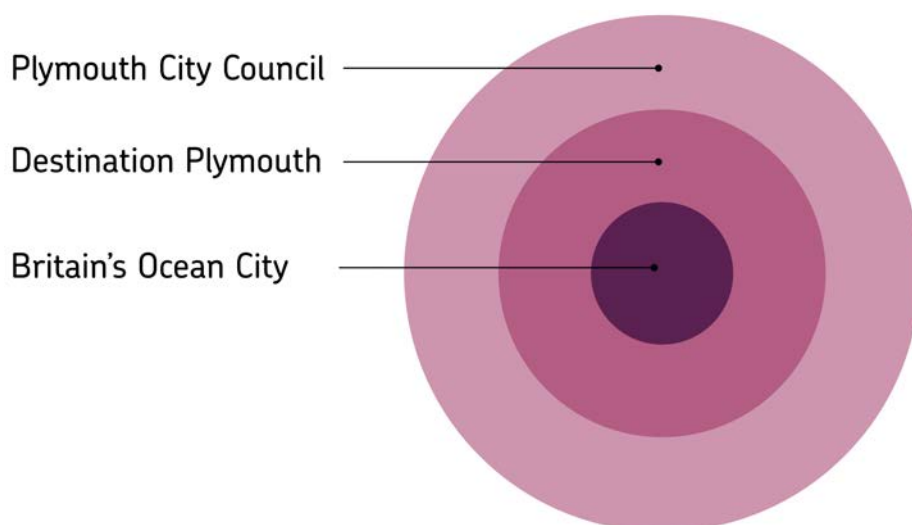
Create

The aim at this stage is to tackle the issues identified in the research: **visibility, experience, narrative.**

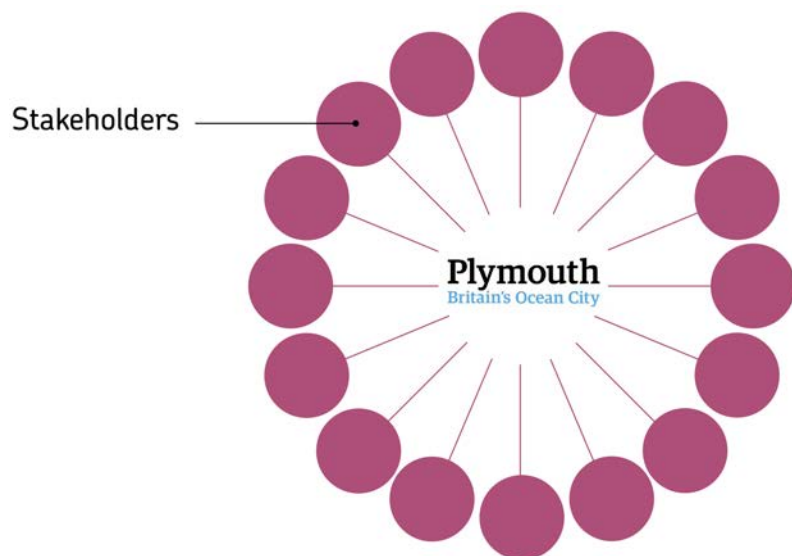
• Visibility

When considering how to improve visibility of the BOC brand, there are two issues to address: ownership and hierarchy. I believe there are three steps to take, in order to achieve this.

1. Make Destination Plymouth board membership more diverse, to represent wider group of stakeholders.
2. Reduce the connection to PCC, to present a more “independent” image. The BOC brand is contained within two existing brands: Destination Plymouth and Plymouth City Council (see below). This dictates the hierarchy and influences perceptions of ownership.



3. Involve stakeholders in the creation process, giving them a direct connection, to nurture a sense of ownership for them.



Visibility: An example

The “I heart NY” logo is an interesting example of brand ownership. It is a registered trade mark, owned by the New York Department of Economic Development (NYDED), who license its use. It is a well-recognised and well-used brand, and each year NYDED prosecute hundreds of cases of unlicensed usage.

By contrast, the BOC brand is not a registered trade mark, and available for any organisation to use. However, usage and recognition, is low. One option to address this could be to register the BOC logo under a Creative Commons license. A Creative Commons license is a public copyright license that enables the free distribution and use of an otherwise copyrighted “work”. This license will make a statement about ownership of the BOC brand, and has the potential to act as an invitation to organisations to use it.

• Experience

To improve the experience of the BOC brand, there are two issues to address: the role of the BOC brand and the impact of the BOC brand.

Role:

It's important to define why the BOC brand exists. Is it just to promote tourism in the city? Or is it to promote everything the city offers - something that will impact residents, businesses, students and visitors?

Impact:

In order to increase use the BOC brand, organisations have to believe it will help them to achieve something they can't do on their own. Or, it will help them to achieve something more efficiently or effectively, than they can on their own. It needs to make an impact.

Therefore it is necessary to understand what will make BOC brand relevant to each audience. Our engagement activity will identify the answer.

Experience: An example

The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games are an example of how to deliver an impact. From the outset, key areas were identified, outside it's primary area of focus (sport), where Birmingham 2022 wanted to make a long-term impact and leave a legacy. These were:

- *Community cohesion, inclusion & pride*
- *Jobs & skills*
- *Business & tourism programme*
- *Youth programme*
- *Venues & infrastructure*
- *Creative & cultural participation*
- *Physical activity & wellbeing*
- *Volunteering*
- *Social value*
- *Sustainability*

The breadth of this programme ensured that Birmingham 2022 will make a positive difference across the community, for years after the event.

• **Narrative**

To improve the narrative of the brand, it needs to talk about the past, the present and the future:

- What the city has done
- What the city is doing
- What the city will do

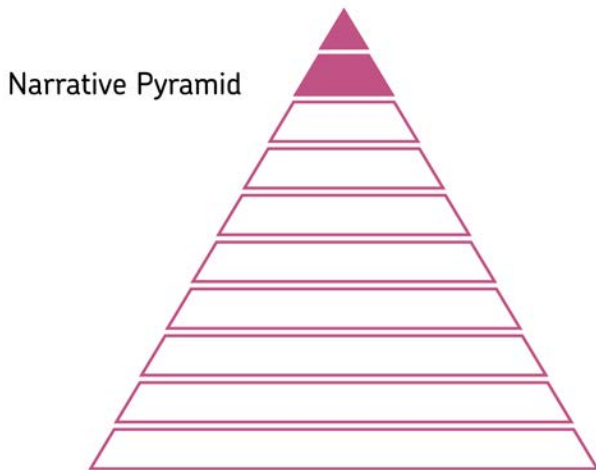
But the narrative needs a theme to bring consistency e.g. "World class". Then the narrative becomes:

- What the city **has done** that was **world class**
- What the city **is doing** that is **world class**
- What the city **could do** that will be **world class**.

To develop that narrative, we suggest actively working with a select group of stakeholders - a Brand Development Group - to co-create proposals for the narrative. This approach to developing the narrative will:

- *Give it authenticity*
- *Demonstrate "ownership"*
- *Create something that is practical for stakeholders*
- *Create BOC brand "community" - invested in its success*

To meet the needs of the BOC brand, we would recommend creating a “narrative pyramid”. This would have multiple layers of messages, becoming more detailed and complex, to meet the differing needs of a wide range of stakeholders and communication channels. The initial focus, at this stage, would be the development of high-level messages.



Narrative: An example

The “Glasgow’s Miles Better” is a good example of creating a successful narrative around a city. The narrative changed perceptions of Glasgow, both internally and externally, in a relatively short period of time.

1983: Launched

1988: International Garden Festival

1990: European City of Culture

“The legacy was a permanent change in attitude towards Glasgow, exposing the reality rather than the rather distorted image people had.”

Dr Michael Kelly, Lord Provost of Glasgow

Conclusion

Although the feedback gathered through this exercise didn’t contain any surprises, it has provided valuable insight into the themes that shape these perceptions. As a result, there is the opportunity to develop a robust brand strategy for the BOC brand, giving it the strength and clarity it needs to change perceptions of Plymouth and the opportunities the city offers.

Appendix 1

Summary of student focus groups

- Overall, they view Plymouth and its environment very positively and intend to stay and work there in the future if they can.
- “A city and the seaside – it’s a great combination”
- “It’s got a good balance between outdoor space and city centre living”
- The waterfront and the immediate environment – Hoe / Barbican were particularly important to them and were visited frequently.
- History and culture don’t have much cut through and are generally not top of mind / important to them
- Claim to be “Britain’s” ocean city lacked credibility – since it wasn’t unique – “What about Southampton, Portsmouth or Belfast?” and as such wasn’t viewed as a strong call to action.
- Don’t feel Plymouth competes on “Global scale” - “National” more realistic.
- They also associated “rich past” (Positioning) with previously dark episodes of the cities past (Slavery / colonialisation / Nazi sympathiser). They recognised social attitudes needed to change, so felt the positioning should be more forward looking.
- Uni group perceive there were limited opportunities for graduates in the city who were looking for their first position / job.
- Many University students had considered other locations, usually based on the grades they achieved, but after visiting Plymouth they particularly liked its location by the sea, and this set it apart from other locations they had considered and clearly engaged them the most.
- Value the fact that Plymouth was not “too busy” and by contrast they didn’t want “quite and boring” – but continued to feel that Plymouth provided a good balance of a good environment and things to do.
- Their decision to stay or go would be heavily influenced by the job opportunities.
- Felt that some areas outside the centre of the city were badly neglected and potentially damaged the perception of Plymouth.
- The only negative issues related to Plymouth geography and the time taken to travel to other places in the UK.
- Plymouth has polar opposites – with the beauty of the harbour and green spaces at one end and the markets at Mutley at the other. “Concrete” city centre’s ageing retail environment.
- Uni group very interested in the cities green credentials and felt it could be doing more to recycle (viewed as poor compared to other cities), protect the environment and use more green energy.

Appendix 2

Summary of resident focus groups

- The location by the sea was the key motivator for the majority of residents to live in Plymouth.
- Family ties were important and had kept many close to / or returning to their original communities in the city
- They all intend to stay and believe there are opportunities for them / their children.
- The water front (The Hoe - visited frequently) green spaces (Central Park) and access to the countryside were particularly liked.
- They value and have a pride in the history of Plymouth – but its too distant / not a strong enough link (particularly with younger residents) to make it part of them “belonging to the city” – it has limited relevance to them as Plymothians now. (Less pride from those "new" to the city)
- There was good awareness of the Mayflower (Pilgrim fathers), Drake and Plymouth’s naval history, as well as the current size and importance of the Naval Dockyard.
- They are proud to be part of the city – but recognised some of this was what they’d know and remembered when growing up, rather than the city now, with many parts being run down and dirty, and little regeneration of the city centre.
- They also valued the friendly community spirit - this sentiment was also mirrored by students, but the older generation felt it had declined in some areas of the city.
- The waterfront was also an area which they visited regularly (not just for tourists) often everyday / every other day (Stonehouse group)
- The majority were aware of the logo, but only on road signs.
- They felt the claim to be “Britain’s” ocean city lacked credibility – since it wasn't unique.
- Don't feel Plymouth competes on "Global scale" - "National" more realistic.

Appendix 3

Summary of email survey of businesses

Email survey of businesses

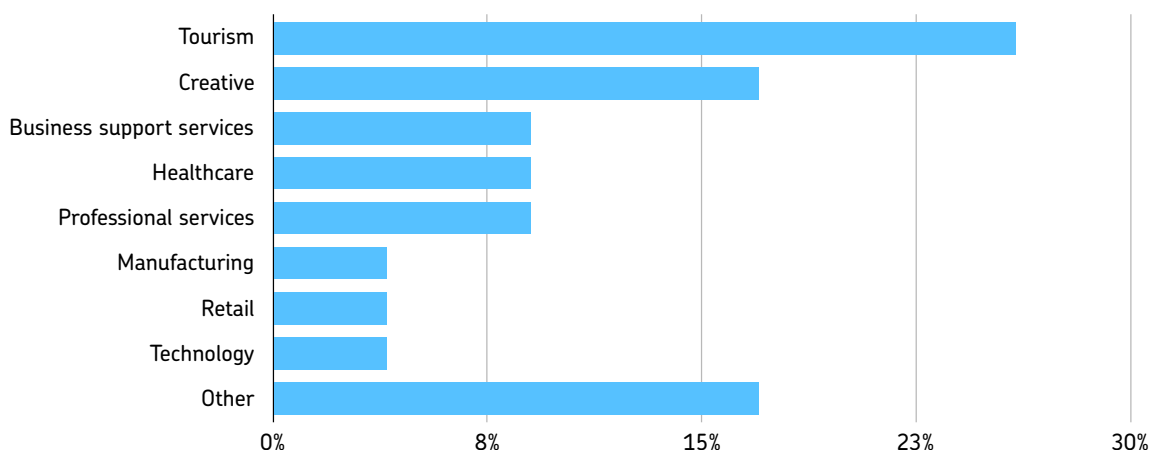
The response rate was low (23 responses), so these results need to be considered in that context. (This response rate reflects the well-recognised challenge of getting engagement from businesses with email surveys. It may also reflect the attitude of the wider Plymouth business community to the Britain's Ocean City brand.)

However, although the group was small, it represented a range of sectors and company sizes.

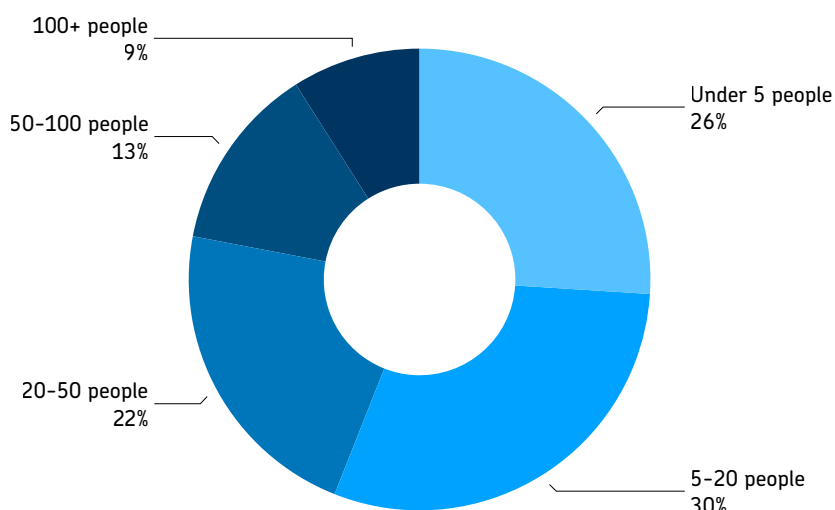
The most significant finding was that, despite high recognition of the BOC brand (100%), only 11% of the businesses used some element of it. This reflects the feedback that was gathered from the telephone interviews with stakeholders.

These are the questions that were asked, and their responses:

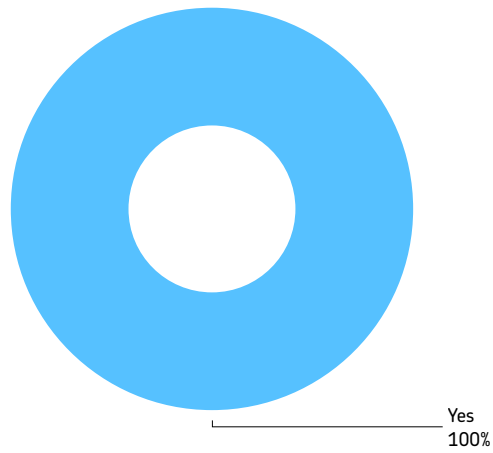
1. Which sector do you operate in?



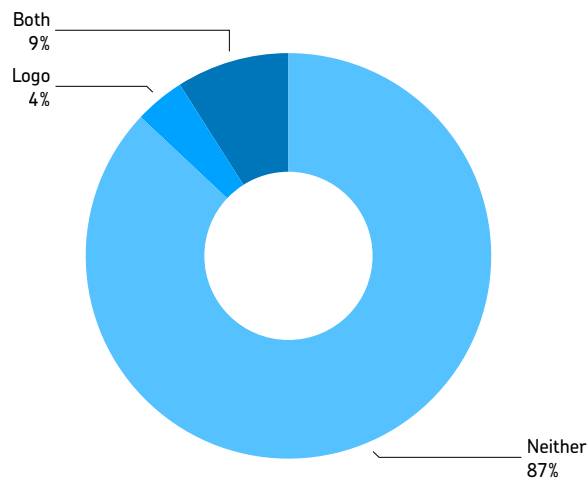
2. How big is your team?



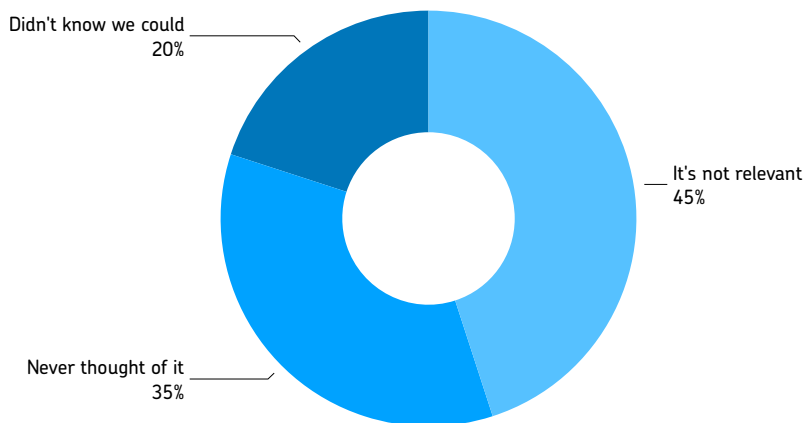
3. Are you aware of the Plymouth: Britain's Ocean City brand?



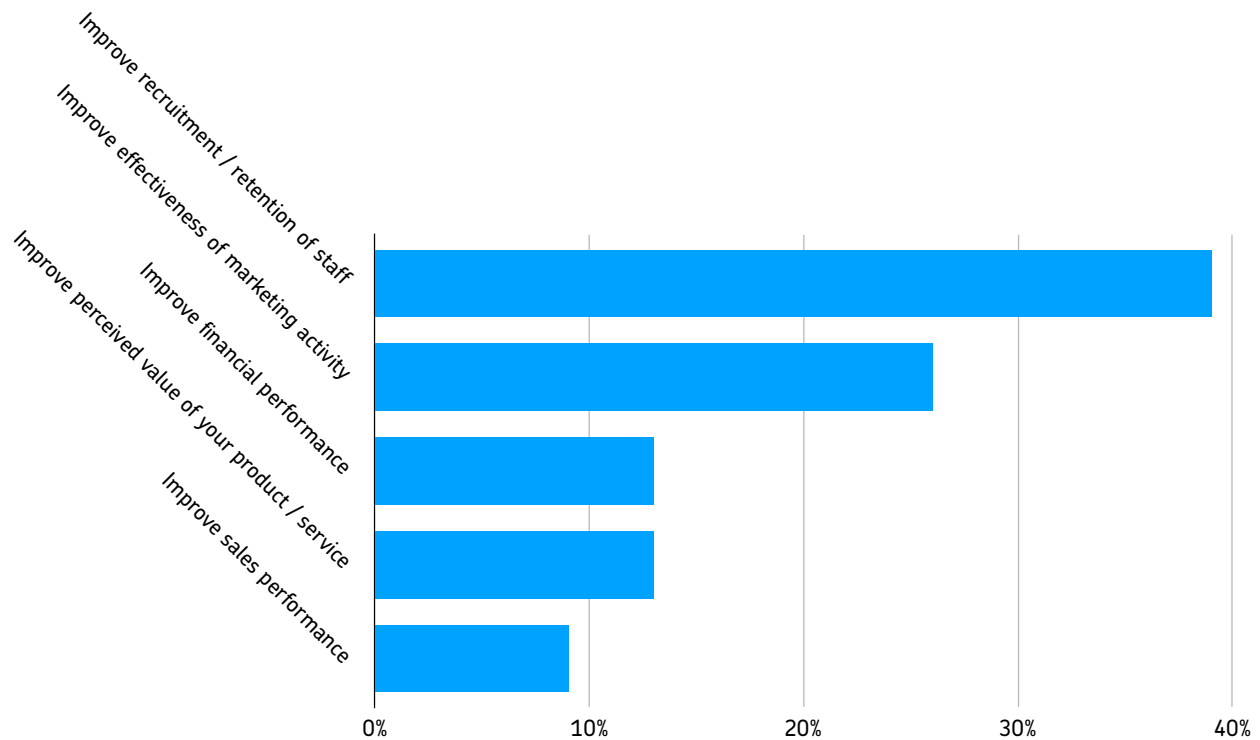
4. Do you use the logo or statement on your marketing material / website?



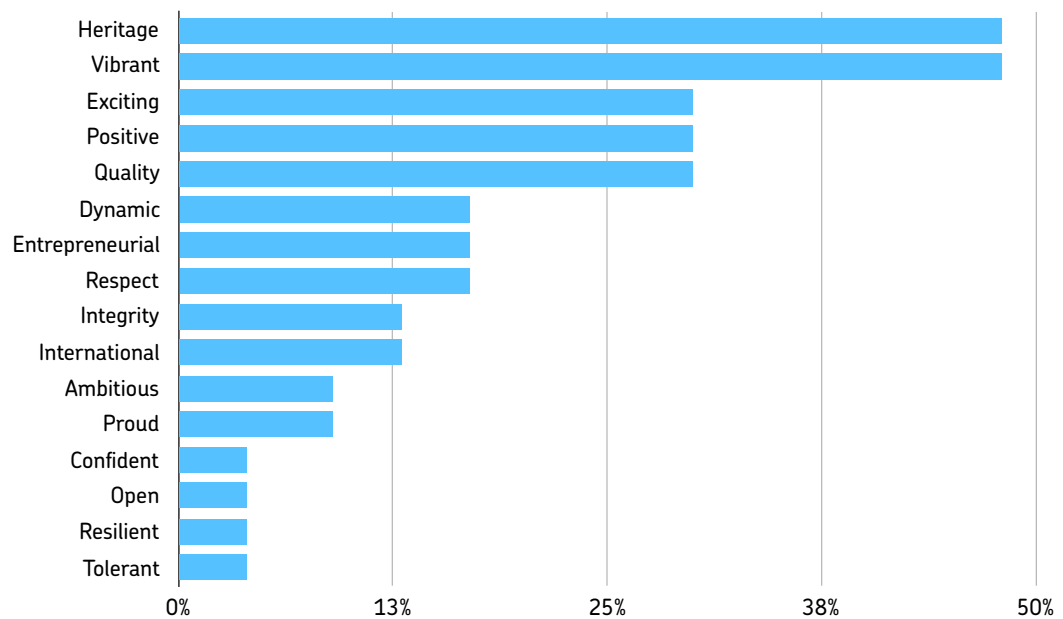
5. If you don't use it, what's your reason?



6. If the Plymouth: Britain's Ocean City brand could bring one benefit to your business, which of the following would be most valuable?



7. Which of the following words would you like customers / clients to associate with Plymouth?



Appendix 4

Summary of email survey of visitors

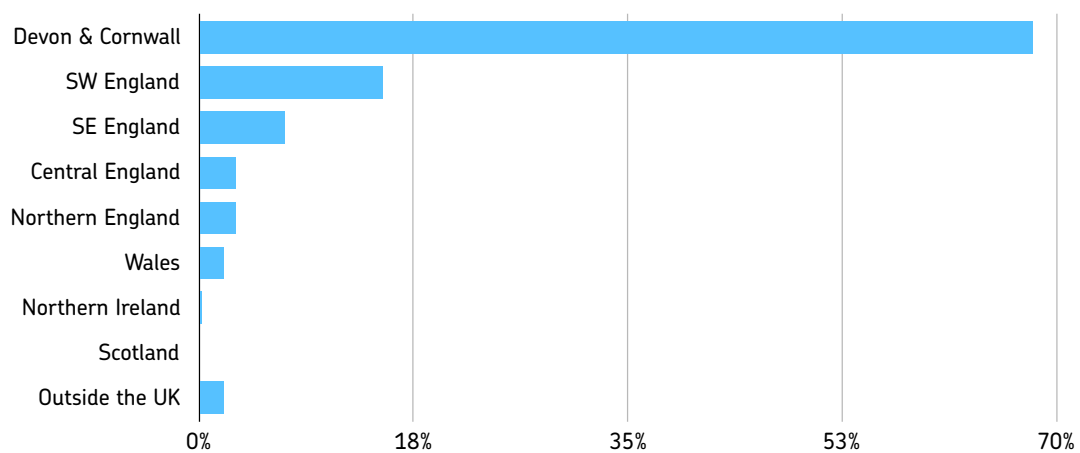
Email survey of visitors

The majority of the respondents were local (Devon & Cornwall), and frequent visitors (50+ visits). Therefore the information gathered is, perhaps, not surprising. However, it does reinforce the more anecdotal feedback we had from the telephone interviews: within the tourism / visitor sector the BOC brand is well recognised.

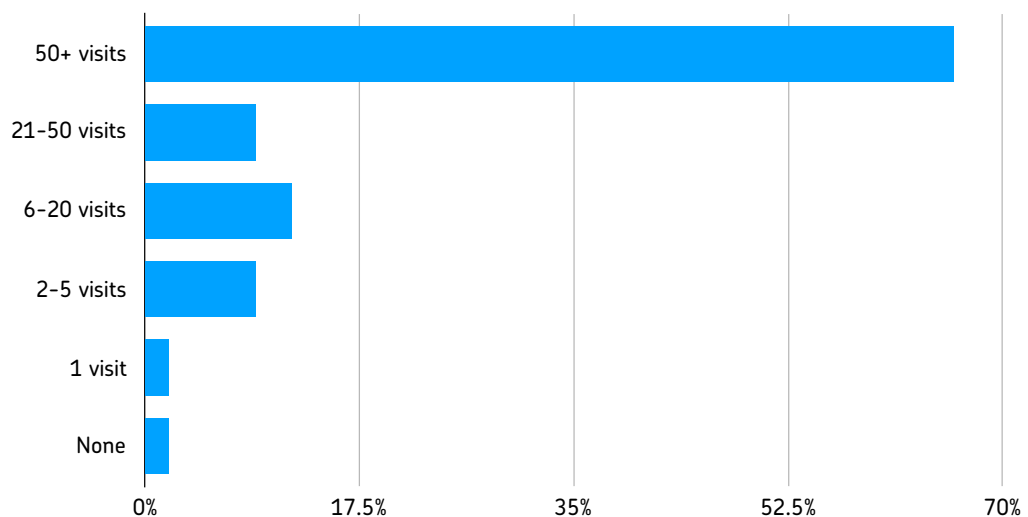
It is interesting to note that, the majority of visitors to the city do visit the waterfront and that “heritage” is the word most frequently used to describe the experience of visiting Plymouth.

These are the questions that were asked, and their responses:

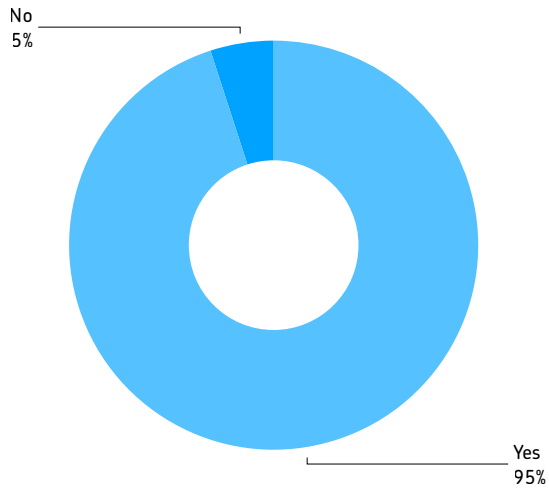
1. Where do you live?



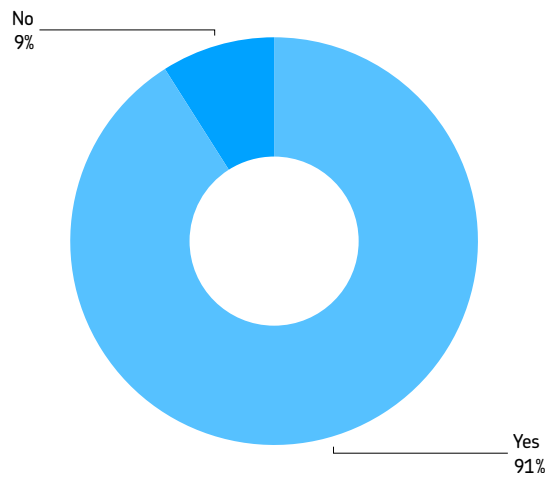
2. How many times have you visited Plymouth?



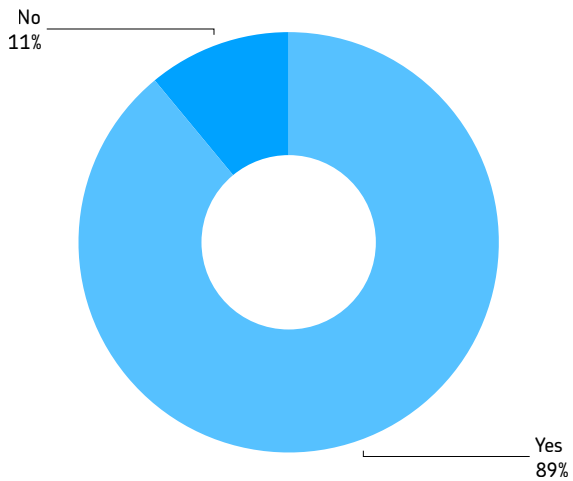
3. Did you visit the waterfront or see the sea?



4. Do you recognise the BOC logo?



5. Are you familiar with the phrase "Britain's Ocean City"?



6. Which of the following words describe your experience of visiting Plymouth?

