Being Human Festival 2020:
An Evaluation of Impact & Engagement

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“I hadn’t appreciated how recognisable it [participation in Being Human 2020] would be. Lots of immediate and tangible impact on funding.”\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Organiser interview
Executive Summary

**Being Human 2020**

Now in its 7th year, the Being Human festival seeks to make contemporary thought, ideas and experiences connected with humanities research accessible to members of the public and non-specialist audiences. The festival is run in conjunction with universities, museums and (university) libraries across the country and is a chance for each organising body to connect with their local arts and culture provision and to reach out to members of the public of all ages to engage them in humanities research and what it means to ‘be human’.

In 2020 festival organisers at the School of Advanced Study, University of London chose to take the event almost entirely online and invited successful applicants to repurpose their events for virtual delivery. Organisers were supported in this regard by the festival team, regional ‘hubs’ that co-support multiple events in conjunction with practitioners, and by the institutions themselves. Mitigation became opportunity, as event organisers sought new approaches, the most impactful delivery and how to leverage the opportunities inherent in online technologies. Organisers and partners wondered about the extent to which the sense of a ‘festival’ could be evoked remotely and wondered too, how this move would impact take up. An independent quantitative and qualitative evaluation would seek to identify any learnings that might be applicable to future years.

Over 300 free events took place in November across the UK. With an intended reach of in excess of 30k people. The festival’s core aims were:
- To demonstrate the value and relevance of humanities research to society in the UK and globally
- To encourage and create opportunities for researchers to engage with non-specialist audiences
- To embed and join together public engagement in the humanities across the higher education sector.

**Festival reach**

### Audience profile 2020

- **72%** female
- **Median age 45-54 years**
- **10%** from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background
- **14%** consider themselves to have a disability
- **86%** university educated (or similar)*

*Of these, **67%** have a degree in the humanities

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*Figure 1 Audience profile data: audience survey Base: 2,047*
In 2020 an estimated 22,720 people watched an event live / in real time across 262 events nationwide. During the festival an additional 12,904 people watched recordings of events that had taken place, whilst 3,645 items of digital content were also consumed (watched or listened to) during this period, comprising content produced for the festival such as podcasts, animations and films. To date, a further 40,624 event recordings have been watched since the festival ended plus a further 5,460 digital content recordings. In total, more than 66k events have been watched live or recorded since the start of Being Human 2020.

Amongst festival goers 72% were female and 10% identify as coming from a black, Asian or minority ethnic audience. 3% identify as ‘Black, African, Caribbean, Black British’ which achieves Being Human’s goal to increase representation amongst this audience from 1.6% in 2019. 14% consider themselves to have a disability which is an increase amongst this audience from 12% in 2019. However it falls just short of Being Human’s ambition of 15% representation in 2020. Many audience members book tickets for events at a distance from where they live and acknowledged that attendance would not ordinarily have been possible, whether due to time, cost or another factor. They reflected on the sense of a ‘global community’ in attendance at many events, heightened by a Chair’s initial welcome, by new perspectives and (due to the nature of Zoom) quite different backdrops. The relative accessibility of virtual events made it possible for many with a disability to attend that wouldn’t otherwise have been able to. However the same technology may have prohibited some with a disability from accessing content effectively.

Engagement with materials and talks produced by event organisers has continued since the live period of the festival, whilst additional engagement took place on social media over the two weeks that events ran. Twitter users increased from 11,446 to 13,400 during this period (an increase of 17%), whilst Facebook and Instagram audiences increased by 17% and 29% respectively.

Motivations for booking and extent to which expectations were met

50% of attendees were motivated to book their event(s) due to an interest in the subject, speaker or institution. 76% of respondents indicated an aspiration to ‘hear more about this topic’ whilst 58% wanted to ‘gain a new perspective’ and 53% to ‘be inspired’.

Word of mouth and local influence were of particular impact in raising awareness of events amongst this audience (34% of respondents found out about an event this way rather than via the festival website or communications).

Even amongst the 50% of attendees that had prior awareness of Being Human, a primary motivator for many (31%) in selecting and booking their event(s) was an interest in the subject or speaker. Overall, attendees report high satisfaction with their experiences of Being Human. 70% rate their event as ‘Excellent’, 86% found it ‘Enjoyable’, 82% ‘Accessible’, 81% ‘Well-organised’ and 73% ‘Thought provoking.’

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2 Figure based on numbers received for 164 events and an average of 85 people per event across 262 events in total
3 To 22 March 2021
4 Q6. Were you aware before today’s event that it was part of a wider festival called ‘Being Human’? Base: 2,054
5 Q7. What were you hoping for from today’s event? (Tick all that apply). Base: 2,053
This data correlates with the high levels of organisational experience noted by event organisers, for 27% of whom public engagement is a major part of their job, whilst a further 24% consider themselves to ‘have extensive experience’.

Two areas for potential improvement were noted in discussion with audience members.
1. Tighter event timings, reduced length and better time management would increase audience enjoyment and perceptions of professionalism
2. Avoidance of jargon and in some cases improved ‘scene setting’ by organisers would improve understanding and enjoyment by those new to a topic
3. Increased opportunities to interact or contribute would have been welcomed at some events.

The online experience

Effective, sensitive and creative event design and facilitation supported audience members’ positive experiences at Being Human 2020. Effective timekeeping, rigorous development of theme and an openness to audience interaction where relevant served to ensure that the majority of events were dynamic, intimate and memorable.

The 2020 audience was older than in previous years, saw a 10% increase amongst female attendees and reported a higher than usual propensity to attend cultural events (whether on or offline). This skew implies that the online offer appeals strongly to this audience, and is of less interest to younger, less experienced consumers of events.

Furthermore, whilst most festival goers reported positively on their online experience, younger audience members reported less satisfaction with this format than their older peers. Just 14% of survey respondents aged 25+ report that the event would have been improved if in-person, whilst 24% of 16-19 year olds and 21% of 20-24 year olds feel that an ‘in person’ event would have been better. This potential inter-generational divide may be reflective of young people’s high expectations and regular consumption of events in the digital sphere, and the fact that there is scope to offer them something unique and highly impactful offline.

Whilst it could be construed that online audiences might diminish once other options open up once again, many participants were optimistic that this new, ‘democratic’ festival platform could be employed in future years, perhaps as one of multiple delivery channels, with specific communities that are key groups for the festival perhaps needing more considered formats and communication.

Audience impacts

“We were in a small group. We could afford to be a bit self-indulgent. Went from discussing how to mend a chair to fixing our society.”

Events impacted members of the audience intrinsically (positive impact on their well-being, their sense of connectivity, changed perspectives on a topic, engagement in a new subject area) and extrinsically (desire

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Fixing It: Mend It with Mo, Goldsmiths, University of London in partnership with Telegraph Hill Community Centre
to seek out new avenues for participation, conversation and collaboration with others, development of new research approaches or creation of new material). 86% of audience members found their event enjoyable, whilst 73% found it thought provoking.

Events had a less powerful impact on participants’ understanding of a subject area: 55% say that it increased their understanding of the topic whilst 50% felt encouraged to find out more about it. For 47% of audience members their event increased their understanding of the subject to everyday life. However this is still an achievement given the accessible nature of festival content and 57% of those attending the festival already having a humanities degree.

Events sparked wider understanding of the subject’s relevance to everyday life amongst 22% of those without a university degree, both those with and without, a prior interest in the humanities. In doing so, they demonstrate the value and relevance of humanities research to society.

“\textit{I would have liked to have been told of local or wider independent opportunities to study.}" 

More might be done to capitalise on audience members’ positive experiences at each individual events, to signpost further resources and to ‘cross-sell’ them to similar listings, whether at a subject, speaker or institution level.

Organisers would value central support with this in order not to dilute opportunities to signpost their own content and materials at the end of an event. Organisers also noted the potential to incorporate some of this ‘twinning’ of events at planning stage in order to explore how far this might be taken.

Where relevant, organisers drew on the support of staff and students from across their institutions, whilst 79% worked with a partner or partners to deliver their activity. These relationships positively impacted the audience’s experience. Use of an individual artist or performer was the most common partnership forged (51% of those working with a partner cited this audience), followed by a heritage organisation (museum / archive) (33%) or arts organisation (29%).

“We always work with a mix of established and new partners to keep the festival fresh each year." 

Being Human seeks to raise awareness of and interest in the humanities. Audience members with prior understanding spoke this year of the extent to which the festival was a metaphor for our times and in itself embedded much that the humanities stand for.

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7 Audience survey Q8: How might this event influence you, if at all? Tick all that apply. Base: 2,022
8 Embrace the Base: Living Legacies of Greenham Women, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London in partnership with Scary Little Girls
9 Organiser survey Q9: Did you work with a partner or partners on your activity? This includes schools, museums, galleries, community organisations, artists and art collectives, etc.
10 Organiser survey, Hub respondent
“The theme matched the world we are in so well and helped us powerfully demonstrate the values of the humanities.”

Those without a university degree were also positively impacted with regards to their understanding of the humanities:

- 24% of those without a degree but an interest in humanities were encouraged to find out more about the subject whilst 10% of those without a degree but an interest in humanities found the event sparked interest in humanities research
- 31% of those without a degree and with no prior humanities research were also encouraged to find out more about the subject.

However, the impacts on subject appetite and on interest in humanities research were considerably greater on those with a degree, with no particular skew towards those with a humanities degree:

- 51% of those with a degree were encouraged to find out more about the subject, whilst 21% found that the event sparked an interest in humanities research
- 49% of those with a humanities degree were encouraged to find out more about the subject, whilst 20% found that the event sparked an interest in humanities research

Organiser impacts

Organisers’ motivations for participation in Being Human 2020 reveal their desire to engage a wider audience and in doing so, to develop their engagement skills. They note the imperative of this in order to collaborate with new partners, secure funding and raise their own profile.

“It helped me on an individual level to raise my profile and develop new skills. It also gave me a chance to work with a partner within the parameters of the festival, which was very helpful.”

Organiser motivations for participation in Being Human

- 80% to engage a new audience with their research or institution
- 69% an opportunity to try a new idea / format
- 60% to raise the profile of themselves or their organisation
- 41% to develop their research through public engagement
- 28% to develop new partnerships
- 28% to enable them to develop a new skill

Figure 4 What were your motivations for taking part? Please tick all that apply. Base 105

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11 Organiiser survey
12 Audience survey Q9. How might this event influence you, if at all? Tick all that apply.
Performance against strategic objectives

Being Human’s operational plan set out strategic KPIs that span event content, organiser support, geographical reach, institutional representation and audience reach and impact. The festival has exceeded its reach and impact in all areas this year (versus 2019). It met its targets with regards to representation of those identifying as ‘Black, African, Caribbean, Black British’, the % of attendees saying that they learned a lot from their event and in terms of audience growth for two of its social media platforms.

The central team took all necessary steps in 2020 to enable the festival to go ahead, including migration to largely online delivery, the offer of additional support for event organisers and enhanced online marketing. Key to success was the willingness of event organisers to adapt and develop their narrative to suit the medium and the technical support of many local engagement teams and volunteers.

Overall, the festival succeeded in delivering high quality, often intimate events across the spectrum of the humanities that prompted increased subject understanding and desire to find out more. Moving the festival online challenged assumptions around public engagement and within certain limits demonstrated the potential of this medium to engage and support largely effective interaction. Not necessarily to be seen as a replacement long-term for face to face delivery and interaction, this medium did succeed in giving a meaningful voice and presence to Being Human this year.

Being Human 2020 also increased its reach this year, though amongst a more culturally engaged, event going audience and including more of those educated to degree level than in previous years. Whilst not problematic in itself and a likely product of the move online, there is tension between expanded reach and this shift in audience demographics and one of the festival’s core aims: namely to widen access to the humanities. A physical presence, attachment to ‘place’ (a geographical hook from which many Being Human events are hung) and the immediacy and the three-dimensional nature of in-person events are all beneficial to knowledge-based festivals. They help to ensure their visibility and attractiveness to younger, less formally educated audience members. For a festival that seeks to expand understanding of its core theme, this is essential, even if delivered alongside an online offer.

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<th>Ethnic Diversity</th>
<th>2019 actual</th>
<th>2020 target</th>
<th>2020 actual</th>
<th>Achieved?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of attendees describing as ‘white’ to remain steady</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>89%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase number of attendees identifying as ‘Black, African, Caribbean, Black British’</td>
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<td>3.0%</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase number of attendees who describe themselves as having a disa</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tbody>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve ratio of attendees saying that they ‘learn a lot’ about the subject / research under discussion at Being Human event*</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase Twitter followers</td>
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<td>13,000</td>
<td>13,400</td>
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<td>1,713</td>
<td>1,567</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Increase Facebook followers</td>
<td>2,407</td>
<td>2,750</td>
<td>2,811</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</table>

* In 2020 Q8. With which of the following statements do you agree? 73% say the event was thought provoking
Conclusion

Being Human’s three core aims are to (1) demonstrate the value of humanities, (2) engage with non-specialist audiences and (3) to embed and join together public engagement across the higher education sector.

It achieves all of these by giving researchers the creative licence and support to articulate their research in ways that embody the varied nature of the humanities and to invite audience discussion. They cause audience members to engage, reflect and interact on their own terms and present material in an accessible way that invites responses from the public that sometimes also influence researcher thinking.

Being Human’s core audience showed signs this year of being skewed towards those in higher education and from a humanities background. Just 14% do not have a university degree or equivalent and 30% do not profess an interest in the humanities. This was possibly a product of the move online and should be further explored.

In 2020 the impact of COVID-19 forced much of the festival online. However in-depth interviews with audience members and reports from organisers reveal the energy with individuals participated in events and the dynamic nature of many of their experiences. Audience members vocalised gratitude that events went ahead (rather than simply being cancelled) and that organisers had sought to deliver their content within a new medium. Far from being a static, two-dimensional experience, Being Human 2020 was brought to life in people’s homes and has had a physical and emotional impact way beyond each individual event. Satisfaction with events was high, which given the culturally engaged nature of the audience is of particular interest. Audience members had relatively few demands for improving the events each attended and these, coupled with high event approval seen elsewhere, reinforce a high level of satisfaction amongst festival goers, both with event positioning and event content.

The cascaded structure of regional Hubs empowers organisers at a local level and invites collaboration, whilst the festival’s own profile and reputation in itself helps organisers to foster and embed new partnerships across the higher education sector. Intrinsically, association with Being Human gives weight to an organiser’s event (and associated research). This is of particular value for early career researchers.

Recommendations

Being Human 2020 events resonated profoundly with their audiences. They prompted emotional engagement, fostered curiosity and engaged some in further exploration of a topic. Noting the power of individual topics to ‘hook’ core audiences that are not ordinarily engaged with the humanities, festival organisers could do more to signpost other relevant events, both at the time of booking and after attendance. They could support event organisers and hubs to make these links and could potentially also facilitate more interaction between practitioners.

Case studies of effective audience interaction could form a useful element of 2021 festival support, which in turn could also consider the potential for the festival to exist both on and offline.

Organisers would value further support with local marketing and with the production of Being Human branded materials such as banners to sit behind speakers or as PowerPoint slide templates to enhance the
value (to them) of their participation in a nationally recognised festival. They would also benefit by support with marketing to non-specialist audiences (both locally and nationally).

Online events expanded the audience reach of the festival. However, this needs to be balanced against depth of engagement and limited capacity of these events to engage communities not already accessing cultural events. This is important in relation to arguments around cost effectiveness as online events are so much cheaper, however the difference in audience make-up this year illustrates the added value of face-to-face delivery.
Research overview

Background

Now in its 7th year, the Being Human festival seeks to make contemporary thought, ideas and experiences connected with humanities research accessible to members of the public. The festival is run by the School of Advanced Study, University of London, in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy. It extends participation to universities, museums and (university) libraries across the country and is a chance for each organising body to connect with their local arts and culture provision and to reach out to members of the public of all ages to engage with them in what it means to ‘be human’.

In November 2020 over 300 free events took place across the UK with a reach of in excess of 30k people. Event and participant numbers increased this year due to the new delivery format but prior to this the festival was already a core element of many cities’ cultural backdrop. Its core aims are:

- To demonstrate the value and relevance of humanities research to society in the UK and globally
- To encourage and create opportunities for researchers to engage with non-specialist audiences
- To embed and join together public engagement in the humanities across the higher education sector.

Evaluation objectives

To assess the extent to which Being Human meets its core objectives by exploring:
- the success or otherwise of the festival in meeting its stated targets for the year
- the experiences of audiences at Being Human festival events
- the experiences of organisers of Being Human activities and events
- the experiences of other stakeholders in the festival (e.g., cultural/ community partners
- involved in the planning and delivery of events.

Methodology

Five research approaches were conducted October to January, some concurrently:
1. Being Human festival event observation: Observation of 10 virtual events
2. Audience survey post events: seeking 500+ participant respondents via on and offline response format
3. Audience telephone interviews: 30 x 15-minute telephone interviews with festival goers
4. Organiser survey amongst key stakeholders and partners: seeking 100+ respondents via online format
5. Organiser telephone interviews with wider stakeholders: 30 x 20 minute telephone interviews with event organisers, hubs and delivery partners

Sample
1. Audience survey: 2,067 completed surveys
2. Audience telephone interviews: 30 interviews conducted including wide event representation
3. Organiser survey: 105 completed surveys
4. Organiser telephone interviews: 24 interviews conducted, amongst geographically diverse organisers including all representatives of all four Hubs
A note on this year’s festival and research methodology

Learning from necessary change
Festival organisers sought this year to mitigate against the impact of COVID-19 on live events nationwide. They offered support to Event Hubs and Organisers as they explored how to take in-person events online and supported organisers in exploring ways of translating ‘in person’ events into a range of online alternatives but to explore the unique merits of virtual delivery. Permission was given for original project concepts to develop and adapt as required. In interview, a number of organisers note a sense of social imperative to put on their events despite some of the challenges faced.

“Our research might offer a prism for how we might approach this time. It’s an imaginative space that we offer - people need this more than ever.”

Organisers spoke with pride of their versatility and initiative in adapting their original submissions. For many this involved the adoption of new technologies or the creation of multi-media materials to support their project. Those that chose to stage a livestreamed performance took on considerable extra work in dovetailing the two strands.

“About four times we changed the format - the project just wasn't one event at one point: there was a lot of connecting with schools, artists etc. I’m proud of our agility. The main thing we focused on was the actual engagement with the audience- being able to get in there during a lockdown.”

In this way festival organisers sought to retain the essence and ethos of the Being Human festival and to ensure that organisers and institutions still had a high-quality platform for showcasing their work. Audience interaction and legacy could remain a priority for those organisers that sought these, whilst the festival could still attract high profile speakers and provide value for partners. The central festival team gave consideration to the impact of virtual ticketing on audience numbers and the extent to which remote delivery would impact their key objective to engage those outside academia, whilst festival organisers saw an opportunity via this year’s festival to intrinsically explore the role that digital engagement might play moving forwards.

13 Hub organiser interview
14 Organiser interview
The Audience of 2020

An engaged, curious, diverse and geographically dispersed audience

**Audience profile 2020**

- 72% female
- Median age 45-54 years
- 10% from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background
- 14% consider themselves to have a disability
- 86% university educated (or similar)

*Of these, 67% have a degree in the humanities*

Figure 5 Audience profile data: audience survey Base: 2,047

Predominantly female, older and educated

72% of survey respondents this year were female, with a median age of 45-54 years. This figure sees a 12% increase year on year and represents a considerable change in audience profile, 10% identify as black, Asian or other minority ethnic group (BAME) and 86% are university educated (or equivalent). 67% of these qualifications are in a humanities-related field.

Figure 6 Cross tab: Q14 ‘Into which age bracket do you fall?’ & Q17 ‘With which statement do you agree?’ Base: 2,045
The 2020 festival appealed most to those age 45+, whether or not they are university educated. The age profile increased slightly year on year, which may imply a preference amongst younger audiences for in-person events. 69% of those with a non-humanities degree fall into this 45+ age bracket, as does 57% of those with a humanities degree and 58% of those without a degree but a broad interest in the humanities. Those without a university degree and that do not ordinarily consider themselves interested in the humanities have the oldest mean age: 71% of this audience is aged 45+.

Varied prior exposure to the humanities

The Being Human festival seeks to share humanities research and perspectives with the widest possible audience.

As part of its this remit, it aims to engage those without prior awareness of humanities study or that have had access to higher education and does so relatively successfully. Whilst only 14% of survey respondents fall into the latter category, over 30% of those attending the festival either have a degree in a non-humanities-related subject or do not have a degree and do not ordinarily consider themselves interested in the humanities.

A slight shift in audience demographics in 2020 towards those with a degree may have been the product of the festival moving online (and events having apparently less regional relevance due to limited local marketing opportunities). A blended delivery model in future years may help address this.

 Experienced event goers

Respondents reveal amongst them considerable experience of attendance at events such as festivals, the arts or university events that is way above that of the national average. 50% attend such an event once or twice a month (or even more frequently), whilst a further 29% attend 3-4 times per year. Though Being Human has always been free and this list includes free university events, the act of registering with individual events and limited ticket availability for many of those attended by respondents suggests a) considered decision making with regards to event attendance and b) expectation of a high-quality event.

Professional interest / need was cited as a reason for frequent event attendance by some of those that attend events most frequently, whilst childcare issues and geography were highlighted as barriers to more frequent attendance. Regardless of the frequency cited, many respondents noted the impact of COVID-19 on their normal patterns: some to acknowledge the wider availability of digital performances and some to note the limitations of event format.

“As a disabled person living rurally and with caring responsibilities, I couldn't have attended if the event was held only in person, wherev ever in the country it was held. High quality digital events like this remove so many barriers to participation.”

Individual events the greatest driver of attendance

Those aware of the wider festival report hugely positively on its perceived values, remit and calibre. It is deemed to play an important role (both for researchers and for wider audience members) in giving a platform to the humanities, to innovative research practice and to local stories and connections.

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15 The national government Taking Part survey revealed that in 2019/20, 76% of respondents had engaged with the arts at least once in the last 12 months
16 Survey respondents with a degree in the Humanities
“I really enjoyed the festival and wish could have done more of the events. Really good at portraying areas of interest to others that know less. It felt inclusive.”

The calibre of individual events was generally such that audience members anticipated a similar quality across other events, when told about the wider festival. The ease of booking and attendance experienced by audience members also reflected positively on perceptions of Being Human.

“I’d be [sic] very likely to have looked on the [Being Human] site. The information, ease of booking, the way it was run, how the event went on the night give them credibility as organisers and hosts.”

Interviewees reported multiple drivers for attendance at an event including prior interest in a topic, familiarity with a speaker, awareness of the organiser’s reputation for events and appetite for stimulating activity or entertainment. Prior awareness of the Being Human festival influenced some to browse the full calendar of events, but they were a minority. Links with a university or library often drove awareness of the events being hosted by that venue. Those without an academic background seem most likely to have been drawn to the subject matter of an event or to the geographic context in which it was set and to have responded to social media or local marketing.

“There was a real sense of pause. I treated it as if I was going out to an event: free of distractions.”

50% of respondents were unaware of the Being Human festival prior to attending their event. They had booked via Eventbrite or an organiser portal and were motivated to attend due to a personal interest in the topic under discussion or the speaker. Event format does not appear to be a driver in itself. Amongst the 50% of respondents with prior awareness of Being Human, 31% were motivated to book due to an interest in the event topic rather than the wider festival.
The majority of respondents new to Being Human had heard about the festival online, whether via social media (29% of respondents), the festival’s own website (18%) or another site (5%). A further 14% heard about it via the festival’s own marketing e.g., an email newsletter. Whilst the positive impact of internet marketing is not surprising for a predominantly digital festival and amongst online survey respondents, there is no overt reliance on this. A further 34% of respondents cited local influence and word of mouth as a driver for attendance. These local influences included university lecturers, students, employers, family members, local interest groups and personal interests. They reveal strong topic-related interest amongst festival goers and the local resonance of many events and imply, too, the ease by which interested parties could signpost events and attendance.

Survey respondents again reveal strong subject-related motivations for attendance when asked what they were hoping for from the session they attended (Q7). 76% indicated that they wanted to hear more about their topic of interest.

Survey respondent, previously unaware of the Being Human festival.
Of these respondents that indicated they ‘wanted to hear more about their topic’ (Fig. 5), 30% wanted to aid their own studies or research and 20% wanted to find out about new university research. These figures imply a large researcher component in the audience. However, a far greater percentage of the audience attended event(s) in order to ‘gain a new perspective’ (61%) ‘to be inspired’ (55%) or ‘to be entertained’ (46%). The extent of personal interest in Being Human events reflects well on their positioning (events are deemed to be accessible to those without subject knowledge) and their format (events are perceived to be enjoyable and entertaining).

Event expectations and the extent to which these were met

Motivations for attendance at an event (Q7) and agreement re. perspectives on the event’s impacts (Q8) were cross tabbed to probe the extent to which expectations were met. Note that both questions offer tick-all response options. To find out something new about a topic and to gain a new perspective were attendance drivers for a large number of participants (76% and 58% respectively) and these expectations were met. 73% of the audience state that the quality of their experience of the event was ‘high’ (Q8) and 74% agree that their event changed their perceptions about the topic either a lot or in part (Q7).
To aid discovery of new university research
- 18% of respondents hoped to increase their awareness of new university research (Q7). In interviews this was expanded upon by respondents who noted the value of this insight into either their own studies, their plans for public engagement or their personal interest in a topic.

To aid personal studies
- 29% of Q7 respondents hoped to aid their own studies or research and this implies that a significant number of those in attendance may have been students / researchers themselves. The event increased awareness of university research in the subject for 25% of these respondents, increased understanding of the subject’s relevance to everyday life for 17% of respondents and encouraged 20% of this audience to find out more about the topic. The event also sparked an interest in humanities research for 9% of these respondents.

How might this event influence you?

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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Increased my understanding of the subject’s relevance to everyday life</td>
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<td>Encouraged me to find out more about the subject</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sparked an interest in humanities research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Had relevance to my own work</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s had no real impact on me</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12 Respondents to Q7 that ticked ‘To gain a new perspective’. Base: 1,532

To discover and amplify knowledge
- By far the highest scoring response to Q7, 76% of respondents indicated an aspiration to ‘hear more about this topic’ whilst 58% wanted to ‘gain a new perspective’ and 53% to ‘be inspired’
- Amongst those that wanted to ‘hear more about this topic’, 49% note that it increased their ‘understanding of the subject’s relevance to everyday life’ and 55% that it ‘encouraged them to find out more about the subject’.
- 22% of those that wanted to ‘gain a new perspective’ found that the event ‘sparked an interest in humanities research’ whilst 59% confirm that it increased their awareness of research in the subject.

High satisfaction rating and high emotional engagement

Strong sense of community
“I’m almost blasé about this now but it’s an incredible experience to be in a room with people from all over the world that you would never get a chance to be with. It’s the most amazing window.”

Many Being Human festival events succeeded in creating a sense of collective participation, despite audience members being geographically distant. Audience members recall how familiarity with Zoom

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21 Imagining Sustainable Fashion Worlds, Nottingham Trent University in partnership with Atlas of the Future
functionality helped facilitate this and that the ticketed, live nature of an event anticipated that everyone present would have an interest in the subject.

“I felt as though the three people were in the room talking to me.”

A number of survey respondents and interviewees watched events in the knowledge that friends and family members were also online at the same event. This shared experience was felt to be hugely personal and positive and motivated further conversation both about the events and the experience.

High approval of events

Satisfaction levels with the festival are high. 70% rate their experience as ‘Excellent’ whilst a further 26% rate it as ‘Good’. Though the survey is self-selecting this is still significant given that so many of the respondents claim to attend events on a regular basis and could be considered relatively discerning. Just 2% of all those surveyed rated their event experience as ‘poor’ or ‘not very good’. This would be a hugely positive outcome ordinarily but is even more so given the programme alterations and new delivery formats that were embraced at relatively short notice.

22 Over the Wall: Cultures of Collecting, Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study in partnership with Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery, Blackburn with Darwen Library and Information service, University Centre Blackburn College
A subsequent tick-all question that explores event perceptions in more depth corroborates these high satisfaction levels. 73% of respondents to Q8 agree that the quality of their experience / event was high. This question also reveals the design and content of such events to be perceived as enjoyable (86%), accessible (82%), well-organised (81%) and thought provoking (73%).

![Audience perspectives](image)

Figure 15 Audience survey Q8. With which of the following statements do you agree? (Tick all that apply)

Reasons for enjoyment were expanded upon in the comments section and in subsequent audience interviews. Participants felt stimulated and sometimes excited by content that was presented accessibly and with pleasure.

“Really enjoyed the event - speakers were all great, and it was a lovely combination of informal friendly atmosphere with genuinely interesting topics discussed intelligently.”

Respondents noted the high calibre of speakers and event design, and this contributed to their sense of overall impression that these were well-organised, thought provoking events. Numerous interviewees and survey respondents cited specific aspects or elements of their event, which implies a high level of personal identification and engagement.

“Really niche topic for creative writing but worked very well. The facilitator had done their research and packed a lot of exercises into the 90 mins. Well-planned with rich material for inspiration.”

“It was sensitively chaired and made particularly memorable by the involvement of a 101-year-old Lakota elder whose contributions were very moving. I almost forgot it was a zoom event, it felt so involving and inspiring.”

The comments section to this survey question reveals two areas for potential improvement:

4. Tighter event timings, reduced length and better time management would increase audience enjoyment and perceptions of professionalism

5. Avoidance of jargon and in some cases improved ‘scene setting’ by organisers would improve understanding and enjoyment by those new to a topic.

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23 Audience survey respondent: Vaccination: Old World, New Worlds
24 Audience survey respondent: Alcohol in the Archives
25 Audience survey respondent: The Wild West of Scotland: From Buffalo Bill to Outlander
Two response options to Q8 that did not score as highly as others concern participants’ ability / inclination to contribute to or participate in, their event. These appear to have been undermined by technical issues that limited access and events where the host chose to limit comments and questions (whether due to lack of technical know-how, resource or time).

“I could not see most of the questions in the Q&A which presumably reflects a flaw in Zoom functionality, so I couldn’t follow what other attendees posted there. Meanwhile, texting comments in a chat or Q&A function does not qualify as “interactive,” although that may be the most manageable mechanism online.”

Innate satisfaction with each event experience

Q11 invited audience members to note how event organisers might have improved the experience. Just 48% of survey respondents chose to respond (versus in excess of 80% to all other questions). This lack of demand for adaptations that might improve the event coupled with high event approval seen elsewhere, reinforce a high level of satisfaction amongst festival goers, both with event positioning and event content:

- 19% of respondents would like increased opportunities to ask questions (9% of total base)
- 24% would like to see increased interactivity (12%)
- 28% would like more background info on the topic (13%)
- Just 13% feel that the content could be made more accessible (6%)

72% of those that answered this question provided further comments. Many of these were simply a positive comment on the enjoyable or thought-provoking nature of an event, whilst others concerned technical issues encountered by respondents.

“Given the problems of having to be online, they did an excellent job of creating an informal atmosphere and encouraging questions. Increased interactivity would have been difficult.”

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26 Audience survey respondent: Are You A Woman?
27 Audience survey respondent: Vaccination Cafe: Old Worlds, New Worlds
A few respondents cited the opportunity to improve the narrational / story-telling aspects of the events they attended, to provide a little more contextual information about key speakers or to provide access after the event to some of the videos or resources discussed.

“I would have appreciated a bit more of a road-map at the outset, indicating what we were going to hear and how the organisers, at least, thought it fitted together.”

Appetite for signposted resources highest amongst those with a degree

52% of all those that complete the survey demonstrate appetite for further information and resources on the topic that they can access both on and offline (Q11). However, examination of Q11 responses by education level show that this demand is skewed towards those with a degree in the humanities (61% of this audience ticks this option versus just 9% of those without a degree but a broad interest in the humanities).

However, events are still successful and thought provoking for those that have not accessed higher education:
- 69% of those without a degree but a broad interest in the humanities rate their event as ‘Excellent’ (Q3)
- 24% of this same audience felt influenced to ‘find out more about the subject’ (Q9)

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28 Audience survey respondent: The Wild West of Scotland: From Buffalo Bill to Outlander
29 Q17 Education level cross tabbed against Q9 ‘How might this event influence you, if at all?’ Base: 437
- 66% felt that the event changed their perceptions about the subject ‘a lot’ (19%) or ‘in part’ (47%).

Positive engagement because of, not in spite of, COVID-19

Whilst individual perspectives and the format and content of events differed, they shared a common backdrop: namely COVID-19. Respondents’ collective isolation, monotony and uncertainty prompted appreciation for the chance to attend live events, to participate in meaningful dialogue on topics of interest and to engage with new audiences. There was a poignancy noted by many respondents in being able to see into the homes of (often greatly admired) speakers, with whom this lockdown experience was shared. And there was gratitude amongst many attendees, that the move to predominantly online delivery meant they could attend events normally geographically out of reach.

“Although distanced by Covid-19, we were united by the moving frank input from the speakers & the artists’ personal representations.”

“The event made a virtue out of the necessity of going online with an interactive 'exhibition' that perfectly re-enforced the 'mutual learning' theme of the event itself.”

“I watched from south Florida. As bad as COVID has been for the world more and more of these events are now accessible from anywhere.”

Warmth towards the wider Being Human festival

Awareness of the wider Being Human festival was low amongst many members of the audience (in particular those from a non-academic background). However, the impact of high calibre speakers, of participating in an interactive event or the opportunity to discover something new all impacted positively on interviewees’ inclination to find out more about it.

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Q17 Education level cross tabbed against Q10 ‘To what extent did the event change your perceptions about the subject?’ Base: 211
“I have already shared some of what I learned with family and friends. I will also look out for similar events in the future, and I intend to share info (links etc) with a council run art class I am a member of.”

“It helped me to feel part of a larger community who experience similar difficulties and prejudices.”

“Encouraged me to follow up links - not necessarily 'about the subject', but prompted by references from speakers and chat.”

There was agreement that more might be done to cross-sell to other events at the close of an event, though this would need to be done creatively. More 'if you like this, you'll like that' event type messaging would have been well received. Humanities as a field or the opportunity to discover other teams’ research work were not spontaneously cited as motivators.

Event design: key insights

Accessibility
Taking into account both responses to the survey and interviews with participants, events were perceived to be accessible, both in terms of the subject matter and the way that this was conveyed. This was true of both students and researchers (who were strongly represented amongst those tele-interviewed) but also of the wider audience. Those without prior in-depth subject knowledge appreciated the small amount of scene-setting given where this was required but found generally that speakers pitched their material at the right level, with minimum use of jargon.

“At the level I was expecting. Prior knowledge enhanced my enjoyment but lack of this wouldn't have been a barrier.”

The impact of unfamiliar vocabulary or concepts on an audience member was to deter them from participating. One audience member found the conversation between speakers at his event a little hard to follow and thus intimidating. He enjoyed the event but felt unable to ask questions via the chat box.

All speakers were perceived to be passionate about their subject matter and keen to engage their audience. There was no inference of intellectual superiority or ambivalence towards their audience: both key to supporting engagement and interaction.

One attendee at another event noted that the speakers’ ‘vernacular was relevant, and not damped down’. For her this conveyed a strong impression that the ‘organisers wanted to connect with people’s experiences’.

Another attendee (with an academic background) commented on the challenges of moderating an event with multiple academics. ‘Any academic thing is going to be a bit snooty: there’s always going to be a bit of back-slapping.’ However, she acknowledged that the organisers of the event worked ‘hard to be inclusive and generally succeeded.’ Another audience member also reported positively on her various events, noting just that some academics might benefit from some support with audience engagement.

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11 American Gothic, University of Manchester in partnership with University of Portsmouth, Square Tower Portsmouth, Portsmouth Central Library
The online offer
A number of audience members and organisers noted the democratising influence of enforced remote delivery of festival events, at least where potential audience members might be presumed to have internet access. One respondent who attended a high-profile event noted that it would ordinarily be a paid event and highly sought after. Her perception was of a ‘new calibre of online speakers and events’ that might herald the way for long-term event change. Another attended four events on the same day and noted the impossibility of doing this ordinarily. His hope was that Being Human might continue to offer remote participation, whether the chance to watch streamed ‘live’ events or a combination of on and offline events.

“Online was an equaliser. You clicked and you had your spot. No need to deal with hierarchy, technical stuff, people with a quiet voice.”

The online format of most Being Human events in 2020 was perceived to have worked well by 48% of respondents and was perceived as having positively influenced the audience experience by 28% of survey respondents, who agreed that it ‘enabled greater opportunities for participation’. In turn, we can infer from this that for 14% of respondents for whom the online event ‘worked well’ there was no advantage to this format over face-to-face delivery.

Telephone interviews with audience members noted the positive impact of an online offer on audience members’ ability to attend events regardless of geographical or personal circumstance. Some spoke of the online offer having democratised attendance and contribution to discussion at an event, however the slightly older, more female and more culturally engaged nature of this year’s audience suggests that accessibility may have been undermined in this way.

Responses in the comments section of Q12 ‘How did you feel about the event being online?’ suggest appreciation of the ‘live’ nature of events. This was reflected in depth interviews where organisers noted the particular dynamic of those ‘that linger behind to talk’ after an event and the ‘value of body

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33 Organizer interview
language”. Scheduled event times heightened the audience’s anticipation, increased a sense of personal commitment and provoked a sense that people with a common interest might come together, albeit virtually. This positively reinforced Being Human as a pop-up festival that many felt fortunate to be part of. However, multiple event goers alluded to ‘busy days’ and to having had to prioritise their preferred events.

“While it would have been good to attend a face-to-face event, the online format allowed for audience participation and for greater dialogue between attendees than would have been possible otherwise.”

In Q12 audience members were asked how they feel about the event being online. Just 14% of all survey respondents feel that the event would have been improved if in-person. This figure is consistent across all age brackets with the exception of younger festival goers: 24% of 16-19 year olds and 21% of 20-24 year olds feel that an ‘in person’ event would have been better and which implies some inter-generational differences, though note the relatively small sample size of each of these audiences (31 and 115 respectively).

Events where speakers attempted to weave on and offline worlds or invite collaboration resonated strongly amongst participants. Effective facilitators summarised and fed back to speakers points made or questions asked in the chat box. This fostered inclusivity and inclination to contribute. Respondents noted that zoom lets them ‘peek’ into speakers’ worlds, that this feels personal and is a great equaliser.

COVID resonance

“It’s been a difficult year for engaging with culture and people in the way that we ordinarily would. I’ve enjoyed people coming together to watch or learn about something. A broader resonance because of this unusual situation.”

Many respondents spoke without being prompted of their gratitude for the opportunity to watch or participate in Being Human festival events and their additional resonance at a time when people have more free time and yet access to culture and stimulating thought is diminished. However, this positivity towards Being Human events was not due to a lack of other available cultural opportunities but was in response to their perceived quality and the inherent enjoyment they provoked: respondents reflected in depth on events and provided multiple examples of their innate strengths.
“I’ve attended events I’d never have dreamed of before. Good for mental health to immerse in something different and new.”

Fixed time and place
During 2020-2021 remote access to arts and culture events became commonplace. The opportunity to book a ticket to watch a pre-recorded ‘live’ performance at one’s convenience became the norm. However, despite in most instances being forced online, Being Human retained the ‘live’ element of its delivery, which had a number of hugely positive impacts, including building anticipation, creating a sense of exclusiveness, the opportunity for real-time debate and delivery within a contextual backdrop (highly relevant for events such as those around the US Election).

“It [the festival] was a good example of how digital tools could reach out to people during lockdown. Especially good as a way of reaching out and giving people a rich experience.”

It also placed organisers under some technical pressure, but where technology failed this was understood by audience members as a possibility within live delivery. The unfiltered nature of delivery via Zoom and the additional opportunities this offered to share multi-media content and invite participation required the audience to sit and watch each event at a pre-appointed time.

“Watching meant I was more focused on it, enjoyed it more rather than doing it alongside another activity. The experience was different: it made it an event. Things like this draw a line under the working day.”

Low commitment
Whilst online free delivery made Being Human events more accessible, it also made ticket holders unaccountable. The ease and anonymity of Eventbrite bookings may also have undermined participants’ sense of personal commitment to some events, though the central festival team always warns organisers to anticipate this. In contrast, one audience member noted that the ease of booking had prompted him to consider a wider spectrum of events and subjects and to browse the Being Human festival website. Though anecdotal, his response, along with other similar comments that arose in interviews, implies that low barrier to entry doesn’t undermine perceptions of the wider festival.

Event dynamics
Event dynamics were variously influenced by their format, delivery style, time management, audience interaction opportunities and the rigour with which they were prepared. Audience members’ own appetite for participation and contribution influenced each event.

“Fabulous - a real cornucopia of different mediums. They used genuine historic photos but then used those to get the expert about Greenham to talk over the top of them. They worked well together. Not laboured. Multi-media bombardment of information.”

Sense of intimacy, though mostly online
Common to many events was a sense of intimacy, created by effective moderation, passionate speakers and audience engagement. This was particularly apparent in the cafes and in those sessions that invited
creative collaboration offline amongst participants. The Chairperson played an important role in making attendees feel welcome at an event: one respondent recalled the host telling them how many of them were watching online and from where in the world.

“We were in a small group. We could afford to be a bit self-indulgent. Went from discussing how to mend a chair to fixing our society.”

A well chaired event positively impacts audience participation
Many respondents acknowledged the positive experience of listening to someone freely sharing their expertise and being willing to answer questions. The inability to see other members of the audience or their reactions didn’t detract from their experience, but a well-planned talk and an effective chairperson were both necessary to ensure momentum and accessibility.

“They got the tone and timings right. Didn’t feel arduous. My husband sat down and got involved.”

“They spoke for too long. Lack of human reaction meant they couldn’t gauge their impact.”

Timekeeping is key
Timekeeping and the length of an event were both noted by respondents as being crucial to ensuring sustained interest and engagement. Generally, organisers were successful in both of these, though longer events demanded a greater amount of audience interaction to be of interest. Audience members were open to events of any length.

“Sometimes virtual events do go on longer but it’s harder to read body language. Sometimes it’s better to leave people wanting more.”

Many respondents noted that the design of their event supported their ability to contribute at a level they felt comfortable with, whether through break-out sessions, the effectiveness of the Chair in being able to amalgamate questions and reflective multiple perspectives or a combination of on and offline activities.

“One person came out and spoke in the second breakout who’d been quiet before. Possibly she relaxed or the others quietened.”

Personal impacts
Considerable unprompted comments around impact arose within interviews: these largely concerned positive impact of an event on a respondent’s well-being, inclination to participate more actively in debate or a subject area (or to find out more about how to become involved) or to engage creatively. At the simplest level respondents noted having thought or spoken about the topic or event since attending. Many noted that once restrictions eased, they would more fully with the subject area or similar events.

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40 Fixing It: Mend It with Mo, Goldsmiths, University of London in partnership with Telegraph Hill Community Centre
41 Shopping for a Cause? British Academy and UCL
42 Sugar, Sugar, Queen Mary University of London
43 It Felt Like Year One: A Tour of Angela Carter’s ‘60s Bristol, University of the West of England in partnership with Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol Festival of Ideas, Know Your Place and Bristol Archives
44 Imagining Sustainable Fashion Worlds, Nottingham Trent University in partnership with Atlas of the Future
“I googled a bunch of things to read and look at later. I talked to a friend. Have generally mentioned it to friends. Talking as much about the attendance at an event as the content itself.”

Propensity to attend more events
There is such warmth towards individual events and when told about the festival such appetite for more information that more might be done to help audience members understand that their event is part of something wider. If possible, those booking an event via Eventbrite or an organiser’s portal might be automatically redirected to the festival website or might receive a link to details of further events.

Within each event, branded materials, a dedicated introduction and / or explanation and online links to other events where such signposting was possible would all have assisted a better understanding of this wider context.

Better still, events might signpost other Being Human events that support discussion of a similar topic, research approach or concept to their own.

“I wasn’t aware of the Being Human festival: it wasn’t branded. I would have looked online in the lead up to the festival but heard nothing from Being Human beforehand and didn’t realise the relationship.”

Extent to which the festival changes perspectives

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<th>How might this event influence you, if at all? Tick all that apply.</th>
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<td>Increased my understanding of the subject’s relevance to everyday life</td>
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<td>Sparked an interest in humanities research</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s had no real impact on me</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Figure 22 All audience survey respondents. Base: 1744

More than half (57%) of audience members note the impact of their Being Human event on their awareness of research in the subject, whilst 51% are motivated to find out more about the subject as a result of attendance. For 48% the event increases their understanding of the subject’s relevance to everyday life.

The festival successfully attracts attendance from many non-specialists, including those without a university degree and those without a formal connection to humanities research, whether students, researchers, academics, or others directly involved in the university or museum sectors. The accessible positioning of events and festival goers’ subject-specific interests appear to be key drivers of these bookings amongst these non-specialists, rather than awareness of the wider festival.

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45 Festival attendee at multiple events
46 Forty Winks Café, Northumbria University in partnership with New Writing North
- 38% of festival goers were unaware of the Being Human festival prior to attending their first event. This increases to 67% of those without a university degree but a broad interest in the humanities and 74% of those without a university degree and that do not ordinarily consider themselves interested in the humanities.

Events achieve wider understanding of the subject’s relevance to everyday life amongst 22% of those without a university degree, both those with and without, a prior interest in the humanities.

- 24% of those without a degree but an interest in the humanities were encouraged to find out more about the subject, whilst 10% of this audience found the event sparked an interest in humanities research.
- And 31% of those without a degree and with no prior humanities research were also encouraged to find out more about the subject.

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Q6 ‘Found out about the festival at the event’ or ‘No, but would be interested in hearing more about it’ or ‘No and I was only really interested in this event’
The event attended changed perceptions about the subject ‘a lot’ or ‘in part’ for 74% of survey respondents. Amongst the 75% of those whose motivation was (at least in part) to ‘hear more about the topic’ these figures are largely consistent, 21% say that the event changed their perspective on the topic ‘a lot’ and a further 54% that it changed their perspective ‘in part’.

However, the impacts are higher amongst those for whom ‘understanding of research’ was a stated motivation. The event changed perceptions ‘a lot’ for 28% of these respondents and ‘in part’ for 58%.

Extent to which the festival fuels further exploration of a topic

More might be offered to those interested in finding out more about a topic after the event. For online events (if these are to be continued after 2020) better signposting of research documents, information and key individuals in an event chat-box would be effective. Some respondents found these links useful and clicked on links / bios during an event. A concluding ‘where to go next on this topic’ at the end of each event would have been positively received. The following quote from one audience member reflects comments made by many interviewees:

“I would have liked to have been told of local or wider independent opportunities to study but it finished and there was nowhere to go with the information which was a shame.”

One early career academic noted that a series of events she attended helped ‘put meat on the bones of her idea’ and to find possible contributors. Others noted how watching speakers debate, proved a catalyst for personal reflection and understanding around their own work.

Over the Wall: Cultures of Collecting, Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study in partnership with Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery, Blackburn with Darwen Library and Information service, University Centre Blackburn College
Activism

The nature of events ‘looking backwards at historical events and forwards to possible social change’ contributed to a sense of participation in active debate and prompted a number of respondents to reflect on how they might become involved in a cause, “contributing time or money depending on circumstances.”

The multi-media, conversational and sometimes hands-on approaches employed throughout the festival appear to have had a positive impact on the extent to which audience members felt part of debate and inclined to consider the wider relevance of an event to them / how they might develop the themes.

“Has helped me to look at something and take it to the next level - think in a less linear way. Has opened up my thinking.”

Participation

Interviewees were hugely positive about the many and varied opportunities to participate in events, which were deemed to make them more engaging and valuable. Audience members also noted the value of these contributions being largely optional (i.e., non-threatening).

Successful examples of interaction include the chat function which ‘moved quickly and enjoyably’ in some events and the supportive nature of the breakout rooms in many. In all of these cases audience members felt that they had a chance to contribute to the discussion, to collaborate with one another (or with the organisers) and to contribute to the outcomes of the event.

“I was with someone looking to repair her society via drama and she's in Bangladesh and there's no way we would have met up. Communities around the globe looking at this area of repair.”

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89 Embrace the Base: Living Legacies of Greenham Women, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London in partnership with Scary Little Girls
90 Imagining Sustainable Fashion Worlds, Nottingham Trent University in partnership with Atlas of the Future
91 Festival attendee at multiple events
92 Fixing It: Mend it with Mo, Goldsmiths, University of London in partnership with Telegraph Hill Community Centre
Impact on engagement with the humanities

The case for humanities
A small number of interviewees with prior understanding of humanities reflected on the extent to which their event embodied what they perceive the humanities to represent and seek to achieve. One audience member at an event noted “all the voices from the UK and America, hearing songs... we felt like we were connected with one another: the very nature of humanities.” Another commented warmly on the use of Arabic during her event, which allowed her to revisit content in the language in which it was created. Though she couldn’t understand it, this unfiltered delivery enhanced her experience and gave her a broader appreciation of context and culture.

The wider Being Human festival and individual events sought to raise awareness of contemporary humanities research and thought, and to help their audiences to explore the many applications of the humanities across society. In the main, they were hugely successful, though more might have been done to help audience members understand prior to an event its context within the wider festival and during the event its pertinence to the wider field and may be something for future consideration.

Audience members recalled aspects of events that impacted their understanding and appreciation of the humanities, whether implicitly or explicitly. The most impactful events were thought provoking, widened understanding and through their design, actually embodied the nature of humanities. One event made a respondent think about the “connection between literature and local history” and the “extent to which place can claim local writers or can’t”. Another respondent with a background in the humanities found that an event broadened her “understanding of the breadth and diversity of the topics that are included.” A third commented that an event changed her appreciation of “how the arts and politics influence one another” and the global importance of this.

“I think it made the disciplinary field a lot broader than I realised. I was very concept focussed but this has reaffirmed my understanding of the crossover between the different disciplines.”

The nature in which the humanities were approached and presented was also important. Events were not didactic and, in many instances, allowed audience members to make connections for themselves alongside the actual speakers.

“Making organic connections as they were coming across them. They [the speakers] both had their separate interests. Seeing them come together was nice from a project perspective but also from a human perspective - connection and discovery.”

This was seen too, in the café style events where the dynamic was deliberately equal, and participants encouraged to join in the debate. This approach was enjoyed by organisers both for yielding sometimes unexpected outcomes and for breaking down barriers between themselves and the public and this two-way dialogue between researchers and the public is very much a fundamental aim of the festival.

“Make it fun rather than feel that it’s academia where the librarian has all the knowledge.”

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53 A Feminist Whodunnit, UCL & London School of Economics and Political Science in partnership with The LSE Women's Library
54 Let’s Talk about Food, University of Manchester in partnership with the John Rylands Research Institute and Library
55 Organiser interview
However, there may have been a case for a little scene-setting at the outset of events in order to help those without an understanding of the humanities to fully appreciate the interplay of disciplines. One such audience member noted “the broader humanities theme [of his event] and how history, geography, culture, social anthropology were all represented” and how explanation of this as the event progressed supported his understanding.

Interest in humanities research

In interview, audience members reported how events had impacted their awareness of and interest in humanities research, both spontaneously and when prompted. These included amongst them some respondents without an academic background but a specific interest in a subject or topic. One audience member commented that the festival “feels as though you’re giving the researchers’ work a chance to be heard”, whilst another at a singing event reflected on an interesting body of work and noted that she would not have heard about it if she’d not attended the event.

Amongst those without a degree there were impacts on intention to conduct individual research and to access others’ work. One survey participant wrote that their event ‘Encouraged [them] to search and inform [themselves] about the speaker’s work’ whilst another said that it broadened their reading intentions. One respondent noted that the talk they attended would support a university application whilst another said that they would find an opportunity following their event, to write on the topic themselves.

Events changed perceptions amongst those with some prior subject knowledge and refreshed insight for those that have moved away from their academic field of study.

“I found there were aspects of the interpretation that I hadn't considered that put me in the mind of doing some more research.”

“My degree was archaeology. I'm aware that if you get away from academics it's so easy to forget about it. Being Human made me aware of how much is going on.”

Those with prior research experience or an interest in furthering their work noted how events stimulated new understanding and might influence their approach. One academic respondent interviewed noted that an event they attended revealed new ways of using archive materials (research practice) and the value of virtual meetings with professional colleagues (research collaboration). Another amateur researcher noted a developed understanding of their local university library resource: that it was much more diverse, wider ranging and accessible than he’d imagined. Another academic at a relatively early stage in her research planning noted the value of exposure to those further on in their work and the impact of seeing their work creatively presented. She also noted that having seen their work first-hand has given her the confidence to approach these academics directly.

“I’m at a relatively early stage: thinking it’s going to become a cross disciplinary thing. The cogs are turning due to the vibrancy of the event and how much is going on.”

56 Over the Wall: Cultures of Collecting, Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study in partnership with Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery, Blackburn with Darwen Library and Information service, University Centre Blackburn College
57 Sustainhoods: Young People's Visions for Sustainable Neighbourhoods, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London
58 Being Human in Conversation: the American Election, School of Advanced Study, University of London in partnership with Bonnie Greer OBE
Part Two: Organiser perspectives and reflections

An academic, collaborative group experienced at public engagement

105 individuals completed the post festival survey on behalf of their university, library or other organisation. 74% identify as female, 19% as male. 56% identify as white British; 16% identify as BAME.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other Asian background</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White and Black Caribbean</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>White and black African</td>
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<tr>
<td>White and Asian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any other mixed background</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Ethnic Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any other Ethnic Group</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
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They included amongst them researchers, hubs and partner organisations from across the UK. 80% of those that completed the survey work at a university and of these, the majority work in a senior academic or early career research role (38% and 26% respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Academic or Researcher</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Career Researcher</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postgraduate student</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Services or Support staff</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>3%</td>
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</table>

Only a small number of respondents (21) do not work in a university. Of this group, one third work as research-active staff for an organisation e.g., curator or archivist and one third as professional support staff across either heritage, arts or research-based organisations. Three respondents are independent artists or performers working within an arts organisation and two are museum / library / archive professionals.
74% or respondents are the main organiser of a Being Human event / series of events, whilst 26% consider themselves to be either a partner or contributor (e.g., a performer, panellist, host venue). The vast majority (63%) of respondents have never received funding from AHRC or British Academy.

**Strong prior experience of event delivery**

Those surveyed represent considerable experience in putting on public engagement events or in presenting research findings in a creative way. For 27% of respondents organising engagement activities is a major part of their job, whilst a further 24% say that they have extensive experience. 66% of those for whom this was their first public engagement activity of that hadn’t had much prior experience were early career researchers and postgraduate students.

**Support and collaboration**

452 individual events are represented amongst those that responded to the survey\(^{59}\). This includes some events that took place over the course of a day, but included multiple sessions, and some events that repeated across multiple dates. 62% of respondents delivered one event, whilst 25% delivered two. Hub organisers also completed the survey and represent amongst them 10+ events each.

\(^{59}\) The official number of events reported by the central marketing team is 250
79% of organisers represented worked with a partner or partners on their activity. A total of 318 partners were engaged overall:
- 35% of organisers that worked with a partner/partners engaged one partner
- 50% engaged between two and five partners
- 15% engaged 6+ partners across their events

Respondents were asked with which type(s) of community or cultural partners they engaged in order to put on their event. Use of an individual artist or performer was the most common response to this question (51%), followed by a heritage organisation (museum/archive) (33%) or arts organisation (29%).

Media organisations, a specialist in conflict resolution and a charity were noted by respondents within the ‘Other’ section of this question.

40% of respondents note that they had forged new relationships in order to put on this year’s Being Human festival whilst an almost equivalent number made use of existing relationships. Almost all those that ticked other when answering this question noted that they had made use of both new and existing relationships.

“We always work with a mix of established and new partners to keep the festival fresh each year.”

Drivers of involvement in the Being Human festival

Organisers had heard about Being Human from a wide variety of sources. Recommendation by a colleague (word of mouth) was the most cited individual source (36% of respondents chose this option) though prior participation is also hugely influential (13% took part in 2019 and a further 13% have taken part more than once previously). Just 4% had heard about Being Human through event media or the website.

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*Organiser survey, Hub respondent*
Reasons cited for taking part in Being Human are outward looking and ambitious. 80% of respondents wanted to engage a new audience with their research or institution and 69% sought an opportunity to try a new idea / format.

Respondents also saw the festival as giving them an opportunity to develop their own practice and knowledge base. 41% wanted to develop their research through public engagement and 28% hoped the event would enable them to develop a new skill.
Finally, organisers also saw personal benefit in participation. 60% hoped that this would raise the profile of themselves or their organisation whilst 25% saw this as an opportunity for career development and 28% saw the potential of the festival to help them develop new partnerships.

A number of audience members interviewed reported the crucial role that Being Human is playing at a time when humanities exposure is diminished, and funding threatened. Two academics noted the value to them of seeing first-hand how to engage the public in their work:

“As an academic I want to learn how to make my work accessible to the public and more interesting. This attaches to increased funding.”

“I have realised this could be a place for me in the future (cross sector working and just the idea of podcasts or of working with clinicians and sociologists rather than scientists). It's interesting to see how other people are representing that cross sector working and to see this disseminated.”

Satisfaction with their festival experience

Satisfaction with their experience is almost universal amongst respondents: 69% rated the event ‘Excellent’ in relation to meeting their expectations and a further 29% rated it as ‘Good’ (a total of 98% reporting positively). A majority of these (60%) chose to expand on their response, and their answers revealed a high level of satisfaction with support from the festival organisers, delight at being part of a larger event, the opportunities to reach new audiences and the chance to put new research ‘on the map’.

“It helped me on an individual level to raise my profile and develop new skills. It also gave me a chance to work with a partner within the parameters of the festival, which was very helpful - i.e., not having to agree everything from first principles but being able to refer to a framework.”

Participants also used the comments section to note challenges and potential areas for development. These included difficulties in reaching non-academic audiences and the need for support with local marketing in this regard, requests for an improved search function within the Being Human festival website and some disappointment with audience numbers.

“The event achieved all of my aims, although attendance for our event could have been better. That is the only thing that prevented it from being ‘excellent’.”

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61 An Introduction to Medieval Ink, Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study in partnership with Book and Print Initiative
62 Visions of Reproduction, Queen Mary University of London in partnership with The Fertility Podcast
63 Organiser survey
64 Organiser survey
Figure 34 Q15. What are you most proud of about this year’s event? Please choose your top three aspects from the following list.

Organisers were proud of the overall quality of their event / activity (70%) and their ability to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 (61%). 42% were proud of the quality of the material presented. Despite some citing audience reach as a challenge, 33% select attendee numbers as one of the three aspects of their event about which they are most proud and 40% note satisfaction with the nature of the audience engaged.

Satisfaction with delivery-based elements of the festival and / or their event(s) is also very high:
- 70% perceive their content to have been very effective in terms of its relevance to their audience.
- 65% perceive their delivery to also have been very effective
- 99% perceive that the format of their event was either ‘Very effective’ or ‘Quite effective’

Figure 35 Organiser survey Q16. In your opinion, how effective were the following aspects of your event?

Comments noted the legacy of events, extensive engagement and audience impacts:
“We had over 1000 unique users and over 3000 page views ... 600 plays of our audio experience podcasts, 95 attendances at sessions and 560 views. Whilst this is a different type of engagement to previous ‘in person’ events, it is an increase on the previous year’s attendances.”

Impacts

Intrinsic and extrinsic

In interviews and via surveys organisers noted two sets of impacts: intrinsic and extrinsic. Impacts on their audience (extrinsic) are noted here. Impacts on their own professional practice and understanding is detailed later in this report.

Impacts on audience members were sometimes deliberately sought as an integral element of an event. Effective facilitation could fuel an energetic debate or co-creation event, whilst some events invited audience members to physically cook, create or design along with the hosts. The organiser of one event used her audience to collaborate on a shared resource she could subsequently disseminate to those interested in the topic:

“It was mainly a Q&A session. Asked the audience to make recommendations for books, film, text about sleep so could create a crowdsourced list of resources we could share. This was successful - had 30 titles on it.”

Other impacts tended towards an aspiration to expand knowledge, prompt new ways of thinking, foster dialogue and potentially inspire further topic engagement. These were not stated aims of event organisers and are not usually measurable but came across strongly in interviews.

“It wasn’t a stick waving exercise [i.e. didactic] but something more empowering and collective. We can all work together and share our cultures.”

One organiser noted that her audience members questioned her approach and the benefits she’d anticipated in this. ‘... they wanted to know what happened next and why I looked at ‘that’ - questioned my research methodology.’ This implies that audience members are capable of engaging with the ‘how’ and ‘why’ as well as the ‘what’ of humanities research.

A number of organisers often benefited by informal feedback on social media or directly from participants or could simply deduce from the level of engagement in their event that it had been successful in this regard.

“Despite or perhaps because of these [COVID-19] constraints we had the most fantastic mixed group of people and it really was the most incredible springboard. Gave us loads more than we could have anticipated in terms of engagement and feedback.”

Audience reach
Survey respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the extent to which they could reach their intended audience. Overall, 36% of organisers found this aspect of their events to be ‘Very successful’ and 56% found this ‘Moderately successful’. Successful reach in this regard refers not just to numbers but also audience profile, with many organisers seeking a platform for their work amongst minority audiences or those that have not attended higher education.

“We reached our intended audience and a much wider pool, which was fantastic, but it also is helping us to re-evaluate who our primary audiences might be going forwards.”

Satisfaction with Being Human’s central and local marketing scores well though not quite as highly as other aspects of planning and delivery:
- 58% perceive their local marketing to have been ‘Quite effective’ but 17% that it was ‘Not particularly effective’
- 85% perceive Being Human’s central marketing to have been ‘Very effective’ or ‘Quite effective’ but a further 15% that it was ‘Not particularly effective’
- Being Human information offered to ticket holders scores least well in this category: 10% of respondents perceive this to have been ‘Not particularly effective’ and 5% that it was ‘Not at all effective’.

“As with all free online events, there’s always an issue with attrition rates, but we still had over 50% of registrations attending the event, which is pretty good.”

Audience attrition affected numbers in some instances, whilst other comments note the unique (and new to them) challenges of marketing an online event. Spontaneous comments in response to this question were largely pragmatic and note the many successes achieved within a challenging year including global reach, offline follow up by event audiences and positive experiences with new technological platforms.

The nature of online delivery made it more difficult for some organisers to feel confident about who their event had reached. Events that might have been delivered in venues familiar to their target audience were often now held online and local marketing demanded a different call to action. Subject or location specific events appear to have been more successful in reaching their core intended audience than those without such a hook.

Legacy
Organisers were asked to reflect on any outputs or legacy of their events (whether achieved or anticipated). 97 respondents answered this question, indicating a level of perceived long-term impact. The most common of these are new partnerships (49) and collaborations (37% of respondents). However, there are physical legacies too: 33% note a creative output (e.g., piece of music). 28% a film, 26% another form of media and 21% a podcast.

One organiser noted the value of their audience engagement on future practice:

“The audiences we reached have stayed with our project development so this enables future project reach in the early part of 2021 and beyond still, as we are engaging with an exhibition and research programme moving into 2022.”

71 Organiser survey
And in their closing comments one hub organiser notes:

“It was great to be involved in the Engage conference and would be interested to talk about further national / international conference opportunities to take the message of the festival out further.”72

In interview, organisers proved themselves adept at highlighting how the legacy of an event might be to create change amongst their audience members, whether in thought or action. This is backed up by audience survey data in which 51% of participants agreed that their event had encouraged them to find out more about the subject and by audience member interviews that expanded on some of the ways in which they had already or planned to, do just this.

“We have a duty in the humanities to support society in coming up with ways in which we can reengage with histories that have been erased.”73

The organiser of one Dundee event noted an aspiration for their event to motivate and drive long-term audience engagement with a series of workshops designed to engage girls with astronomy and engineering.

Event delivery

High satisfaction overall

Responses to Q18 bear out the high satisfaction ratings given by organisers: there isn’t one specific aspect of event delivery that scores particularly poorly. 39% of respondents note the challenges posed by COVID-19, whilst 37% note that their audience numbers were not as high as they would have liked. Perhaps contributing to the lower-than-expected audience numbers, 33% of organisers also note that their event(s) didn’t get the level of visibility that they had hoped for.

![Figure 38 Q18. Which aspects of your event didn’t go so well?](image)

72 Organiser survey
73 Organiser interview
When asked to reflect on the effectiveness or otherwise of the online format, 67% of organisers perceive that the online format ‘worked well’ whilst 53% felt that it ‘enabled greater opportunities for participation’. This is significantly higher than the audience’s response to the online format and amongst whom just 28% thought that it ‘worked well’ and implies discrepancy between audience and organiser perceptions. For some organisers it had been a challenge to consider how to pivot delivery to this medium, whilst others commented the time-consuming nature of creating relevant interactive content. However overall there was satisfaction with what was ultimately delivered and new skills acquired in the process.

**Nuanced use of online technologies**

When interviewed, organisers revealed a nuanced understanding of the implication of online delivery. They recognise that whilst it facilitated entry for many and presented an unthreatening means of participation, it might be difficult to gauge audience reaction and to support those less comfortable in that setting. There were no spontaneous comments from national organisers regarding the impact that online delivery might have on the profile of audience members, though comments such as the one that follows reveal the sensitivity and thought that many organisers put into events that could properly engage the public in their work.

“You need different people to hear each other and see one another’s point of entry and to feel safe validating their own experiences and hearing others.”

Some organisers revealed adeptness at use of online tools and the ability to create atmosphere within their events. The confidence and preparedness of the speakers facilitated this, whilst the nature of some events invited a more ‘freeform’ response.

“One woman took a toaster apart - she'd keep giving us an update. She was a participant. But the guy

**Support from Being Human**

**Budget**

Respondents were asked whether they could have done more with more budget. 57 respondents answered this question and of these, 27 organisers [xx %] said that their funding was adequate. This was in part due to the lower costs attributed to an online event (no need to hire an audience venue) but also due to effective budget planning and economies sought in delivery. Generous support in-kind and some additional financial assistance from universities and other partners is also noted.

“With what we planned and the intended reach of participants, the budget was had was enough. Out institution and partners provided generous support (e.g., staff time, over heads, free advertisement, etc.) which was crucial to the success of the event.”

30 organisers felt that additional budget could have been helpful in the delivery of their event(s). They included amongst them a small number that received no funding but that incurred unexpected event costs due to COVID-19 such as the need for a Zoom licence, other software or for support with the technical

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54 Organiser interview
55 Organiser survey
aspects of their event. Also noted are the ‘hidden’ resource costs attached to an event including an organiser’s own time and / or those of volunteers.

“We had the full budget for a small hub programme. We had weekend of workshops that were well costed. A lot of additional work went into making and changing arrangements with partnerships to enable good online and face to face delivery. More money for administration time would have been helpful.”

Central support

Organisers were asked to rate the support offered by the central festival team. This was rated extremely highly overall: 70% rate the festival team support as ‘Excellent’ and a further 29% rate it as ‘Good’. When interviewed, Hub teams note that they signpost all of Being Human’s supporting resources to their organisers and cascade any additional information received.

Other aspects of the support offered also score highly:
- 57% rate the additional resources ‘Excellent’ and 33% as ‘Good’

“I found the guidance helpful re. the visuals - used the Being Human colour scheme and fonts. Made it coherent and look great. Templates for the video introductions would have been helpful. Lots of the checklists were more aimed at live one-off events and so a little less useful.”

- 56% rate the festival website ‘Excellent’ and 36% as ‘Good’
- 46% rate the central marketing and messaging for Being Human as ‘Excellent’ and 43% as ‘Good’

There were calls amongst organisers for “more flexible/editable marketing templates ... so that local branding could also be incorporated.” both on and offline and within multi-media productions.

One interviewee noted the organisers’ prompt support on social media. “Constantly retweets and does a good job of spotlighting events. Good at amplifying what we do.” However some organisers asked for

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76 Organiser survey
77 Organiser interview
78 Organiser survey
79 Organiser interview
greater support with social media at a local level to enable greater recruitment from amongst a geographically close audience or particular cohort.

Being Human masterclasses are scored by 58% of survey respondents (the lowest number of respondents choosing to score a category and thus implying lesser awareness or engagement). 42% perceive them to be ‘Excellent’ and 52% as ‘Good’.

**Network building**
Organisers gain exposure, credibility and recognition through their association with Being Human. This impacts positively on their relationship with their own institution and their profile amongst others. The extent of partnerships developed to support the delivery of every event and organisers’ own feedback that these are often long-term, further helps join together humanities practice across the sector. Organisers share ideas and best practice and with the support of Hubs can continue to place public engagement central to their work.

More still might be made of the existing networking opportunities offered by Being Human to event organisers. Alternatives to Facebook (deemed a little cumbersome) might facilitate information sharing by organisers themselves and support cross-selling to one another’s events.

“Wish I had more time to get involved [with the Being Human community] – it’s an embarrassment of riches. Not sure how well the Facebook group was used. I was so focussed doing what we did well, that we forgot to look up.”

In interview some organisers note that Being Human could benefit hubs, organisers and audience members by flagging up similar events run across different institutions. Links might be drawn at a subject, research practice, speaker or event type level but would serve to support collaboration, profile and audience engagement. One hub organiser wondered whether links might even be drawn at application stage, where applicants with shared intention and offer might be introduced to one another.

From a research perspective, organisers note that there are trends in practice and themes and that there would be benefits to projects to be introduced even at a granular stage.

“I did go through the programme and had a nebulous sense of our connection with one another. But maybe there are ways of…. cross selling?”

**Feedback**
Two organisers noted in interview that as practice-based researchers it can be difficult to gain recognition for their work. The profile of Being Human and their association with this greatly assists this. One organiser noted that direct feedback from the festival to departmental heads would also be impactful, if possible.

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80 Organiser interview
81 Organiser interview
Organising hubs can be a useful learning experience for organisers, often helping them to reflect on their event and their successes / areas for growth. For example, wrap up meetings are often held to explore all aspects of both planning and delivery (including the extent of audience engagement).

There is praise for the simplicity of a one-size fits all evaluation tool as employed by the Being Human festival team, but some organisers felt it cumbersome to introduce the survey at the start of their event. Greater centralisation of survey despatch would be found effective.

**Value of association with Being Human**

**Strong team support**

"You raise your game in turn because you've got that enthusiasm and commitment from them."

Value of association with Being Human exists both at a micro and macro level:
- Organisers derive confidence, event expertise and event insight from the central festival team who are perceived to be hugely professional, supportive and empathetic
- They derive benefit at a professional profile and practice level from association with an event of international standing and profile. The Being Human seminars, pre-festival fora BH seminars, pre-festival fora and social media all help organisers to frame what they do.

**High profile**

"Being Human is national and international but also helps us make local connections particularly outside our immediate area."\(^\text{82}\)

Intrinsically, association with Being Human gives weight to an organiser’s event (and associated research). This is of value for early career researchers.

"Weight and authority: being part of academic discourse. It gave us a good hook: people understood internally what we were trying to do."\(^\text{83}\)

The festival helps drive and sustain awareness of the humanities which in turn supports funding, drives student interest, and attracts collaborators. One organiser noted the significance of local engagement but of course the silver lining was the visibility of their colleagues’ work to people in Netherlands, US and Germany.

"We are struggling in terms of our student numbers, to preserve the humanities. We have to keep putting ourselves on the map both internally and externally. To be part of the only national arts and humanities festival is very important."\(^\text{84}\)

One organiser summed up the four discrete areas in which participation in Being Human was of value to the work of many of their peers: (1) audience awareness build, (2) audience reflection, (3) raised profile of...
own work within their institution and (4) springboard for further research. These four impacts were reported variously by other interviewees. Another Hub organiser noted that the key impacts of participation is to further long-term third-party partnerships which themselves are embedded in research projects.

Figure 40 Q23 What is the main value of taking part in Being Human festival? Tick all that apply. Base 105

Responses to Q23 reveal the considerable value associated with participation in Being Human, both in terms of exposure, reach and credibility but also in terms of the leverage it offers researchers in terms of collaboration with new partners and across disciplines.

Professional benefit

Visibility
- 81% of organisers agree that participation yields additional publicity and visibility for their activity
- 63% agree that it raises the visibility of their research / department / institution nationally
- 57% perceive that association with Being Human adds prestige to their work
- 43% perceive that it supports their public engagement skills

“It was profoundly impactful on me as a researcher to participate. My experience was transformative. I am grateful the committee took a gamble on supporting me - the reach of the final film is breath-taking, and it was joyous to present legal research in a humanities context.”

Close to half of organisers reported some form of media coverage with 9% attracting national media and 25% of organisers achieving local online coverage and 10% local radio coverage. In addition to this, whilst 49% achieved no media coverage, many noted the value of social media and / or university coverage within their completed surveys.

Impact on own practice

In interview, organisers note the significant impact of participation in Being Human on their own research practice, their understanding of public engagement and (in some cases) on their research. Hub organisers note too, that Being Human events help institutions to pilot a project that is then in a stronger position to secure further funding.

- 53% of organisers see their association with Being Human as an incentive to work with new partners / collaborators
- 49% see it as presenting them with opportunity to collaborate with new partners

“The events gave me evidence that you can approach the topic from different directions and still get to have interesting conversations.”

Additional funding

Organisers were asked to estimate any additional funding levered as a result of their Being Human events / activities. 33% of respondents answered this question.
Twelve organisers noted additional funds received. These ranged from a few hundreds of pounds from their university to cover specific costs, to match funding from funders (including the Wellcome Trust and the host institutions).

“Not additional funding per se but doing Being Human is part of our future plans which we wrote into a funding bid to Wellcome for funding of our Centre.”

Organisers benefited by £400 of in-kind support on average. This primarily took the form of donated time but also extends to technical licences, print, marketing support. Respondents are quick to note a desire to pay people in creative fields for their time wherever they were able to do so.

“This is difficult to estimate but included: 1. Zoom hosting2. Staff time of the two academics running the event; 3. Admin support time to prepare materials, podcast editing and hosting, distribute packs etc 4. Preparation and participation time for the guest bibliotherapist in conversation, and the academic who recorded the podcast. For costing purposes, it would probably be in the range of £1500-2000.”

When interviewed, organisers were expansive in highlighting the value of association with Being Human, in terms of the quality of the event they were able to put on, their reach and the subsequent impact on their work (and funding).

“Greater prestige and awareness. I hadn’t appreciated how recognisable it would be. Lots of immediate and tangible impact on funding - Arts Council budget immediately approved. Being Human as a springboard was critical to funding.”

What would organisers do differently?

Q21: With hindsight, what would you do differently next time?

Respondents were asked to comment freely in Q21 what they would do differently next time when organising an event. 64% of organisers answered this question.
Improved (or increased) marketing was the most given response: 33% of respondents would devote more time and / or funds to this.

24% of respondents indicated that they would improve their event planning. This encompasses use of technology, allowing adequate time for theme development, better clarification of team roles, speedier decision making up front.

22% of respondents would seek to improve their event delivery, ultimately with the aim of improving their audience experience and their own impact. Suggestions for improvement included more efficient use of all technical applications on offer in order to support interaction (e.g., breakout rooms in zoom), better time management and (for some events) the chance to return to in-person delivery.

Conclusions and recommendations

The 2020 context

The central festival team’s flexibility and support for national organisers permitted them to put on an event suited to their experience, their differing narratives and available resources. This is a reflection of the autonomy given annually to those putting on events and a strength of the Being Human model.

The vast majority of supporting materials produced by the central festival team lent themselves well to online deployment and could be promoted more actively to further increase take up. Organisers saw value in marketing support that help brand their event as being part of the festival which in itself reflects the high value that event organisers place upon being part of something bigger than themselves.

Event organisers proved themselves to be adept at sourcing local support and additional resource to assist in their pivot to online delivery. Public engagement remained a priority for universities during this time, though some organisers did express concern at the loss of physical visibility of their event and the potential impact of this on their university’s understanding of their work. Whilst online delivery was deemed to have been delivered successfully it is not viewed as an adequate complete substitution for in-person events.

The value of an online offer

Audience members reflected on the opportunity to watch and participate in an event without the travel, cost and time barriers of an in-person event. In many cases facilitators successfully created intimacy and a sense of personal insight into speakers’ lives. Non-attendance figures did not appear to be significantly greater than for live events.

The central festival team succeeded in communicating to organisers the necessity of event moderation suited to the medium. Most events were dynamic, interactive and pitched well. Future online delivery guidance might seek to increase organiser confidence and wherewithal with regards to time planning, use of interactive tools and to signposting additional follow-up resources.

The move to online delivery had a significant impact on audience demographics. Though participation increased overall it shifted towards older, more culturally engaged women. The percentage of younger festival goers and of those with less prior exposure to cultural events diminished accordingly. Whilst virtual delivery might be considered in future years this should be as part of a blended offer, not a substitute for in person events.
The value of retaining an offline offer

- The merits of the online offer (increased reach and the potential for audience members to widely explore the Being Human programme) should be weighed up against lost opportunities for events that demand physical exploration and interaction or that are firmly attached to geographical ‘place’.
- The shift in demographic towards an older, more female audience in 2020 away from younger festival goers reinforces the need for online delivery to be just part of the offer. Younger festival goers and those less culturally experienced or confident may seek the immediacy of in-person events.

Support for event organisers

- Many organisers reflect on the extent of personal time and energy they put into their events and the help they sought locally. However, they see this investment as worthwhile, both in terms of building their experience of public engagement and their personal visibility.

What do audience members seek?

- Interest in Being Human is at an event-specific level first, which if positive, appears to pique an interest in other, similar events. More could be done to signpost relevant events to audience members both prior to attending their first session and afterwards. Critically, audience members are most motivated by content first, then speaker: if in future years a blended model of online and offline delivery is adopted then there is potential for every participant to have the broadest possible exposure to a subject of choice. To facilitate this and to avoid programme clashes, more might be done to promote recordings of events and to encourage audience members to seek out relevant content.