Media and press guide

About the festival

Background

Led by the School of Advanced Study, University of London, in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy, the Being Human festival is the UK’s first and only national festival of the humanities. Founded in 2014, the festival demonstrates the breadth, diversity and vitality of the humanities and that research in the humanities is vital for the cultural, intellectual, political and social life of the UK and globally.

Building on the success of previous years, this year’s festival aims to deliver a high profile, networked, and cohesive series of events across the UK. The festival will provide a spark to ignite activities in universities and other institutions across the country and provide a locus around which to coordinate events celebrating the vitality, interdisciplinarity and social relevance of the humanities in 2021.

Being Human 2021 will take place Thursday 11 November – Saturday 20 November, with festival activities focusing on the theme ‘Renewal’.

Primary objectives

The core objectives of the festival are:

- to demonstrate the value and relevance of humanities research to society in the UK and globally;
- to encourage, support and create opportunities for researchers to engage with non-specialist audiences;
- to embed and join together public engagement activities in the humanities across the higher education (HE) sector;
- to demonstrate the relevance of the humanities to everyday life.

Nationwide reach

The Being Human festival takes place at locations right across the UK. We also have a small programme of international activities. As such, it is very important that audiences at local events are made aware of other activities taking place as part of the festival and alerted to the central website and communication channels.

Press and media

One of the goals of the festival is to secure media coverage across the UK to elevate the Being Human festival’s message and engage the public in humanities research more broadly. While the
central team will focus on getting coverage in national outlets, you can help by engaging with your local media. We strongly encourage you to work closely with your institution’s press and media team to pitch pieces and to secure press and media coverage. Please be sure to send any press coverage you receive to beinghuman@sas.ac.uk so we can highlight it on social media and ensure it is included in our records. Take a look at some of the previous media coverage of the festival on our website.

Lessons from previous festivals

Based on our experience, we know that press are most interested in activities that:

- Reveal new research
- Present humanities topics in innovative or surprising ways
- Connect to broader themes and the current news agenda
- Highlight surprising local stories

Key messages

- The humanities are vibrant, interdisciplinary, accessible and relevant to all
- The humanities inspire and enrich our everyday lives
- The humanities can help us to understand ourselves, our relationships with others and the challenges we face in a changing world

Checklist

Have you…

☐ Shared your event and participation in the festival across your organisation's platforms (website, mailing list(s), social media, noticeboards etc.)
☐ Added the event to local press listings
☐ Written and distributed a press release
☐ Sent personalised pitch emails to relevant journalists, editors and producers (including local radio)
☐ Sent personalised invites to press to attend the event
☐ Considered having one of your spokespeople write a piece about the event for submission to local media outlets
☐ Considered advertising your event in local press or other outlets
☐ Considered approaching relevant podcast hosts or producers

Five top tips

1. Connect the research and expertise to the news – make it newsworthy and relevant
2. Think about the incentives of journalists, editors and producers – how can your research help them achieve their objectives (e.g. audience numbers, number of clicks)
3. The topic must be relevant, popular and/or surprising (surprising alone isn’t enough)
4. Keep pitches short, newsworthy and direct. What do you have to offer them? Tell them why it matters
5. Remember to always be inclusive and approachable in your language. Exclusionary vocabulary does exclude. Academics are used to writing for specialists, but remember you are speaking to generalists – think about the big picture.
Types of platforms to approach

Here are a few ideas about platforms you could approach. Do your research and ensure you are familiar with the tone, style, work and audience of each platform.

- Special interest/subject publications
- Regional newspapers (print and online)
- National newspapers (print and online)
- Local radio
- National radio
- BBC local news online
- Local television
- Podcasts relevant to the subject matter
- Local bloggers or “influencers”
- Special interest/subject blogs
- Online publications including the Conversation (check if your institution is a partner or funder)
- Regional online publications and websites including Tourist Board websites (e.g. The Londonist, Time Out, Visit Manchester etc.)

Lead times

- Monthly publications: three to six months
- Weekly newspapers: four to six weeks, four to six weeks for features
- Daily newspapers: one to three days for news, two to three weeks for features
- TV news: two to three weeks
- Radio stations: one to two weeks
- Blogs: two to three weeks
Templates

Template pitch email

Dear [insert name – really important to personalise emails when working with press],

I thought you might be interested in a forthcoming event here at [insert institution name]. The event will feature [insert any prominent speaker/performer names with a brief explanation of their credentials] and focus on [insert a short, snappy description of the key theme of the event].

The event was selected to be part of Being Human, the UK’s only national festival of the humanities.

More details are below. You are warmly invited to attend [be sure to mention if there will be a reception].

Please let me know if you have any questions or would be interested in speaking with some of the researchers involved.

[Insert event details here or simply paste the press release into the body of the email].

Template press release

NEWS RELEASE
[INSERT DATE]

[Insert University name] to host event for national humanities festival
[Insert event type] explores [insert few words about theme of event]

[Insert university name] is hosting [insert event name], an event in Being Human 2021, the UK’s only national festival of the humanities. This involves [insert brief details on event, making mention of any prominent speaker/performer names]. The event was selected to be part of Being Human by the festival organisers, the School of Advanced Study, University of London, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), and the British Academy (BA).

The [insert event name] aims to engage with the public on [insert description of key themes, highlighting newsworthy research, unusual methods or other attention-grabbing detail]. It will be held during the festival, which runs from 11-20 November, on [insert event date, time and location].

[Insert spokesperson’s name, role and University name] said: “[insert quote]”.

As part of a 10-day national programme of big ideas, big debates and engaging activities for all ages, the event aims to champion the excellence of humanities research in [insert UK region], help to demonstrate the vitality and relevance of this today and showcase how the humanities helps us understand ourselves, our relationships with others and the challenges we face in a changing world.

In 2020 Being Human encompassed a largely digital and online programme of 300 events and activities in 54 towns and cities across the UK, with a total estimated audience of 30,000.

The 2021 festival is themed around ‘Renewal’. The programme promises to be exciting, entertaining and thought-provoking, with something for everyone in our diverse communities.
ENDS

Notes to Editors

1. For all enquiries, please contact: [Insert details of appropriate person at you institution here]

2. Being Human: a festival of the humanities, 11–20 November 2021
   Led by the School of Advanced Study, University of London, in partnership with the
   Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy, Being Human is a national
   forum for public engagement with humanities research. The festival highlights the ways in
   which the humanities can inspire and enrich our everyday lives. For more information,
   please visit www.beinghumanfestival.org or follow the festival on social media at
   @BeingHumanFest.

3. [Insert your institution boiler plate information]

4. The School of Advanced Study (SAS), University of London, is the UK’s national centre for
   the promotion and support of research in the humanities. SAS and its member institutes
   offer unparalleled resources, facilities and academic opportunities across a wide range of
   subject areas for the benefit of the national and international scholarly community. Last
   year SAS welcomed 996 research fellows and associates, held 1,500 events highlighting
   the latest research in the humanities, received 31.6 million online visits to its research
   resources and platforms, and hosted 100,119 visits to its specialist libraries and collections.
   The School also leads Being Human, the UK’s only nationwide festival of the humanities.
   Find out more at www.sas.ac.uk or follow SAS on Twitter at @SASNews.

5. The Arts and Humanities Research Council is part of UK Research and Innovation. We’re
   the UK’s largest funder of arts and humanities research and training, investing over £100
   million every year. We fund independent researchers in a wide range of subjects, including
   history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages, design, heritage, area studies,
   the creative and performing arts, and many more. The research we fund provides social
   and cultural benefits that contribute to the economic success of the UK, as well as to the
   culture and welfare of societies around the world. Find out more about us at ahrc.ukri.org,
   or on Twitter at @ahrcpress.

6. The British Academy is the UK’s national academy for the humanities and social sciences.
   We mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future. We
   invest in researchers and projects across the UK and overseas, engage the public with fresh
   thinking and debates, and bring together scholars, government, business and civil society
   to influence policy for the benefit of everyone. www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk
   @BritishAcademy. For further information please contact Sean Canty at the British
   Academy Press Office on scantly@thebritishacademy.ac.uk or +44 (0)20 7969 5273.
Q&A for spokespeople

Below is a list of questions that journalists may ask you. We have provided answers to them here so that you can prepare yourself or your spokespeople for interviews. As such, these are intended for internal use only and should not be publicly posted or distributed.

1. What is Being Human?

   Being Human is the UK’s only national festival dedicated to demonstrating the breadth, diversity and vitality of the humanities. Members of the public from across the country can attend hundreds of free events sharing the new and exciting thinking in the humanities. This year, the festival promises 10 days of big ideas, big debates and engaging activities for all, themed around ‘Renewal’.

   Led by the School of Advanced Study, University of London (SAS) in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), and the British Academy (BA), the festival will be held for 10 days from 11-20 November with activities held in towns and cities across the UK. For the 2021 festival many events and activities will also take place online.

   At heart, the festival is all about making research in the humanities – from art history to philosophy, history to classics, and literature to languages – accessible and fun for as many people as possible.

2. Why is the festival being held this year?

   Being Human is the UK’s only national festival dedicated to demonstrating the breadth, diversity and vitality of the humanities. Now in its eighth year, the festival is an annual fixture and is growing in ambition every year. In 2020, 30,000 people attended tuned in to over 300 events and activities from home, all of which displayed the variety and impact of humanities research in the UK.

3. What is the partnership between SAS, AHRC and BA?

   The School of Advanced Study, Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy are three of the main national bodies dedicated to the promotion of research in the arts, humanities and social sciences. All three organisations, in different ways, are publicly funded to support, promote and facilitate research in the humanities, so it is a natural partnership.

4. Will the festival cost the taxpayer any money?

   The three main organising institutes (SAS, AHRC, BA) are publicly funded, so the taxpayer has paid for the festival through this funding. The festival itself focuses on demonstrating the value of funding research in the humanities and enabling the wider public to get something back from that research. It also enables researchers to connect with the public, giving them opportunities for dialogue about their subject. For more information on how SAS, AHRC and BA are funded, please visit their websites.

5. Why do the humanities deserve our attention?

   The humanities form an essential cornerstone of human knowledge, culture and understanding. They have been studied and celebrated for thousands of years and form the basis of our understanding of ourselves and our relation to the world and each other. They provide tools for communication and debate, means through which to articulate and interrogate complex ideas, ways of understanding our past and anticipating our futures. We need the humanities now more than ever to help us address these issues and provide the means to question, interpret and explain the human condition.