

## **Being Human 2021: ‘Health and wellbeing’ prescriptions for post-pandemic UK**

It comes as no surprise that the ‘Health and wellbeing’ sub-theme of the Being Human festival of the humanities (11–20 November) is dominated by what has been described by MPs as one of the UK’s worst ever public health failures – its response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This year the festival’s ‘uber-theme’ is also highly pertinent – ‘Renewal’. And the current historical moment offers opportunities to rethink, to do things differently, to renew.

Following a largely digital festival in 2020, with online audiences exceeding 30,000, many event organisers are returning to in-person events this year, from walks and tours to workshops and talks – all designed to make university humanities research fun, appealing and relevant to all.

Now in its eighth year, this UK-wide festival is led by the University of London’s School of Advanced Study in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research and the British Academy.

“The pandemic has had a profound impact on being human: on our daily lives, our physical and mental health, and the way we spend our work and leisure time. Researchers across the humanities are working hard to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our health and wellbeing, from developing historical insights to exploring the significance of our domestic spaces.” said Professor Sarah Churchwell, the festival’s director.

Scotland again offers innovative approaches, like [Life after lockdown: the Lothian Diary Project](#) organised by the University of Edinburgh. Drop by the Leith Walk police box at the busy intersection of Edinburgh communities. It is hosting an interactive display of self-recordings made by residents for the project during the pandemic and lockdown in 2020-1.

Alongside the display there will be games for younger children, and a poster exhibition of research work on the diaries, and the role of charity partners in collecting diaries from vulnerable groups. And researchers can explain how this resource with its authentic local voices is making history, helping education and influencing policymaking.

There is also a [Renewing bodies, visualising emotions](#) art-based workshop exploring how our bodies and emotions have changed during the pandemic. It will focus on the relationship between what we feel (for example, through touch or smell) and how we can represent it through drawing and visual media. Take a look at how artists have tried to make sense of Covid-19, mental health, and emotions through their work, and get to create your own piece of art based on your body experiences with the help of an expert artist.

In the context of Covid-19, schools across the country have been designing Recovery Curricula. [Pandemic recovery: emotion, language and health in](#)

[schools](#) organised by School of Advanced Study, is a discussion exploring the role creativity and multilingualism can play in this curriculum, considering the diverse experiences of students throughout the pandemic.

The conversation will cover key questions: How can educators inclusively support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of pupils in this recovery? When addressing difficult and complex experiences, what opportunities and challenges are presented when we embrace the multilingualism of our classrooms? What is the role of arts and performance in implanting an effective educational recovery programme for pupils across schools in London and the UK?

How has the pandemic affected experiences of home for ethnic minority, migrant and faith communities in Liverpool? [Being at home in Liverpool during Covid-19](#) (Queen Mary, University of London and University of Liverpool) is a small event sharing local findings from the [Stay Home Stories project](#), with community researchers based in Liverpool giving short talks on their work. These will include interviews, podcasts and films made with participants from migrant, ethnic minority and faith groups in the city.

There will be a chance for you to ask questions project findings and time for an open discussion to explore how people across Liverpool have supported each other throughout the pandemic.

This event also launches a report based on these findings to be shared with local communities, civil society organisations, faith groups and policy makers. The Stay Home Stories project is a collaboration between the University of Liverpool, Queen Mary University of London, National Museums Liverpool, the Royal Geographical Society, Birkbeck, University of London and the Museum of the Home.

Other 'Health and wellbeing' highlights include:

- [Hopeful ballads: music, memory, health, & history](#) (organised by University of Reading). In 17th century England, broadside ballads were a popular form of music usually composed by writing new lyrics for familiar folk tunes, printed on loose sheets with block-print illustrations, sold cheaply all over the country and sung in taverns, fairs and market squares. Over two workshops, a music therapist, a historian, an artist, and care home residents will come together to explore historical and current ideas of what promotes health in old age – like music, memories, company and hope. Residents will create their own early modern ballad around these themes, the historian will share how early modern ballads were produced, all will have the fun of performing the song, and drawing illustrations that the artist will then convert to woodcuts for the final ballad sheet.
- [LGBTQIA+ loneliness and belonging](#) (organised by University of Exeter). The pandemic has exacerbated loneliness among LGBTQIA + people in the South-West, with queer spaces disrupted and support mechanisms blocked. This online event invites you to a discussion and sneak preview of a new play by Exeter-based writer, Natalie McGrath, which dramatises the experiences and histories of LGBTQIA + loneliness and belonging across the region.

- [Laughter is the best medicine?!](#) (organised by University of Wolverhampton). How has humour helped you cope during the pandemic? This exhibition explores how comedy can be used as a coping mechanism and to promote well-being and connectedness in a time of isolation. Submit your own examples of the memes, jokes, and funny stories that have got you through the most difficult times of the pandemic to [comedyandcovid@gmail.com](mailto:comedyandcovid@gmail.com).
- [Listening is a superpower!](#), a live, online guided exercise from the University of Edinburgh. Enjoy the wellbeing benefits of mindful and creative music listening at one, two or all three of these lunchtime sessions broadcast from St Cecilia's Hall and Music Museum.

These are just samples of more than 200 free public activities taking place across the UK from 11–20 November.

The full Being Human 2021 festival programme is available at <https://beinghumanfestival.org/events>

Find out more about the festival at <https://beinghumanfestival.org/> and follow the latest news on Twitter at [@BeingHumanFest](https://twitter.com/BeingHumanFest).

**ENDS**

### Notes to Editors

1. **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](http://www.beinghumanfestival.org) or follow the festival on social media at [@BeingHumanFest](https://twitter.com/BeingHumanFest).
2. **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](http://www.sas.ac.uk) or follow SAS on Twitter at [@SASNews](https://twitter.com/SASNews).
3. **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](http://ahrc.ukri.org), or on Twitter at [@ahrcpress](https://twitter.com/ahrcpress).

4. **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](http://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk) [@BritishAcademy](https://twitter.com/BritishAcademy). For further information please contact Sean Canty at the British Academy Press Office on [s.canty@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:s.canty@thebritishacademy.ac.uk) or +44 (0)20 7969 5273.