



Being Human 2014 evaluation results: An 'inspiration for innovation'

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We're pleased to present an independent evaluation of last year's Being Human festival of the humanities, especially because it reports that the festival was distinctive, exciting, diverse and an inspiration for innovation in public engagement. Furthermore, by fostering collaboration between event partners, it made a significant and visible contribution to the UK's cultural life.

Written by [Dr Ruth Townsley](#), the evaluation report based its findings on a survey of 1,254 festival attendees, 26 'vox pop' respondents and 45 participating organisations. It confirmed that feedback on the nine-day UK-wide festival, which involved 163 public events dedicated to the humanities, highlighted 'a strong desire for an annual national festival of the humanities'.

Being Human 2014 ran from 15 to 23 November. It attracted between 15,000 and 20,000 visitors who took part in a range of humanities research celebrations. They included lectures, film screenings, theatre and dance events, interactive 'experiments' and debates. These activities were organised by 161 participating institutions, 57 of which were registered as 'lead participants' for their festival events.

Using qualitative and quantitative data about peoples' experiences and perceptions of this first national festival of its kind, the evaluation considered the success of Being Human 2014 against its stated aims, which were to: inspire innovation in public engagement with leading research in the humanities; foster collaboration between higher education institutions, independent research organisations and cultural and community partners; make a significant and visible contribution to the national cultural life of the UK in November 2014; demonstrate the need and desire for an annual national festival of the humanities.

These aims were clearly met. Findings point to visitor comments that many of the activities changed their perception of humanities research, and that they were surprised to find that academic events could be so 'accessible, relaxed and welcoming'. Others said they felt 'inspired, informed and enthused by the content and delivery of events' and therefore inclined to do further research and reading on the topic. More importantly, some of those surveyed confirmed the festival had 'showcased the intrinsic value of humanities research for them personally, and for wider society.'

For event organisers, Being Human 2014 not only demonstrated a high demand for humanities research-based events, it also helped renew and confirm public interest in their disciplines. They felt the festival events generally provided experience of doing public engagement work, created opportunities for innovation, experimentation and creativity, led to the creation and development of new and existing partnerships and promoted and validated humanities research'.

One lead participant summed this up succinctly: 'It showed us that there is a public appetite for intelligent discussion of the humanities. Not overview, not simplification, but genuine discussion'. Other comments included:

- It was a really good experience and precisely what we ought to be doing: breaking out of the institution and spreading some humanities joy!
- 'When members of the public engage with, and contribute to your research it reminds you why you got into arts and humanities research in the first place. It's joyful!'

The evaluation also highlighted some areas for improvement, however. Some attendees mentioned that venues were too cold, too hot, difficult to find, or that the events remained 'too academic' in tone. Perhaps more significantly, the 2014 evaluation data also indicated that although the profile of festival attendees by ethnic group broadly matches national statistics for white, mixed/multiple, and 'other' ethnic groups, proportionally it was less successful in reaching the UK's Asian and black groups. Gender-wise, it reached more women (53.6 percent), but significantly less men (35.2 percent) and disabled people (10 per cent) than might have been expected.

With preparations for Being Human 2015 (12–22 November) well underway, we've taken the report's findings into consideration. Training was offered to all event organisers taking part in this year's festival, and a much wider range of events will be on offer. Five 'festival hubs' have been set up outside South East England to offset any perception of 'London centrism' – funded by a new partnership with the Wellcome Trust working alongside SAS, the AHRC and the British Academy, and there is even more diversity on offer this year. Events working with Polish communities in Aberdeen, young offenders in Manchester, and with people disabled through injury in the mining industry in Swansea are set to challenge any lingering perception of the humanities as 'ivory tower' pursuits. Partners this year helping us to build the diversity of the festival include the Black Cultural Archives, Birmingham's Drum Theatre, Bradford Literature Festival and grass-roots community organisations across the country.

Come along and experience it for yourself this November!

The full independent Being Human 2014 report, including recommendations, is available to view [here](#).

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

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Notes to Editors:

1. **For further information**, please contact: Maureen McTaggart, Media and Public Relations Officer, School of Advanced Study, University of London +44 (0)20 7862 8653  / Maureen.mctaggart@sas.ac.uk.
2. **Being Human: a festival of the humanities 12–22 November 2015** Led by the School of Advanced Study, University of London, in partnership with the Arts & Humanities Research Council and the British Academy, Being Human is a national forum for public engagement with humanities research. The festival will highlight the ways in which the humanities can inspire and

enrich our everyday lives, help us to understand ourselves, our relationships with others, and the challenges we face in a changing world, and foster world-class knowledge that is vibrant, vital, and accessible to all. For more information, please visit www.beinghumanfestival.org or follow the festival on Twitter at [@BeingHumanFest](https://twitter.com/BeingHumanFest)

3. **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 and celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2015. It was officially opened on 15 March 1995, by Sir Anthony Kenny as a federation of the University of London's research institutes and, since then, has established itself as the UK's national humanities hub, publicly funded to support and promote research in the humanities nationally and internationally. SAS and its member institutes offer unparalleled academic opportunities, facilities and stimulation across a wide range of subject areas for the benefit of the national and international scholarly community. In 2013-14, SAS: welcomed 743 research fellows and associates; held 2,081 research dissemination events; received 26.4 million visits to its digital research resources and platforms; and received 202,891 visits to its specialist libraries and collections. The School also leads the UK's only nationwide festival of the humanities: Being Human. Find out more at www.sas.ac.uk or follow SAS on Twitter at [@SASNews](https://twitter.com/SASNews)
4. **The Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC)** funds world-class, independent researchers in a wide range of subjects: ancient history, modern dance, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, English literature, design, the creative and performing arts, and much more. This financial year the AHRC will spend approximately £98m to fund research and postgraduate training in collaboration with a number of partners. The quality and range of research supported by this investment of public funds not only provides social and cultural benefits but also contributes to the economic success of the UK. www.ahrc.ac.uk
5. **The British Academy** is the UK's expert body that supports and speaks for **the humanities and social sciences** – that rich variety of disciplines that study peoples, cultures and societies, past, present and future. It funds research across the UK and in other parts of the world, in disciplines ranging from archaeology to economics, from psychology to history, and from literature to law. The British Academy seeks to raise understanding of some of the biggest challenges of our time through policy reports, forums, conferences, publications and public events. The Academy receives around £30m a year in Government grants to support its work. But it operates autonomously as a Fellowship of more than 1,000 of the world's most eminent scholars in the humanities and social sciences, elected for their outstanding research. For more information, please visit www.britishacademy.ac.uk. Follow the British Academy on Twitter [@britac_news](https://twitter.com/britac_news).
6. **The Wellcome Trust** is a global charitable foundation dedicated to improving health. We provide more than £700 million a year to support bright minds in science, the humanities and the social sciences, as well as education, public engagement and the application of research to medicine. www.wellcome.ac.uk

