

Think Human Festival 2024

At a glance

What is Think Human Festival?

Think Human Festival showcases research and teaching in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Oxford Brookes. Our festival programmes demonstrate the relevance of these disciplines to our everyday lives as human beings. Our events are free and open to all, providing opportunities to reflect on the importance of understanding ourselves, our relationships with

others and the challenges we face as a changing society in a complex world. To engage with our diverse communities, keeping their interests and needs front of mind, Think Human creates spaces for debate and reflection that incorporate theatre, music, film, poetry, exhibits and a range of activities as conduits for the exchange of ideas.

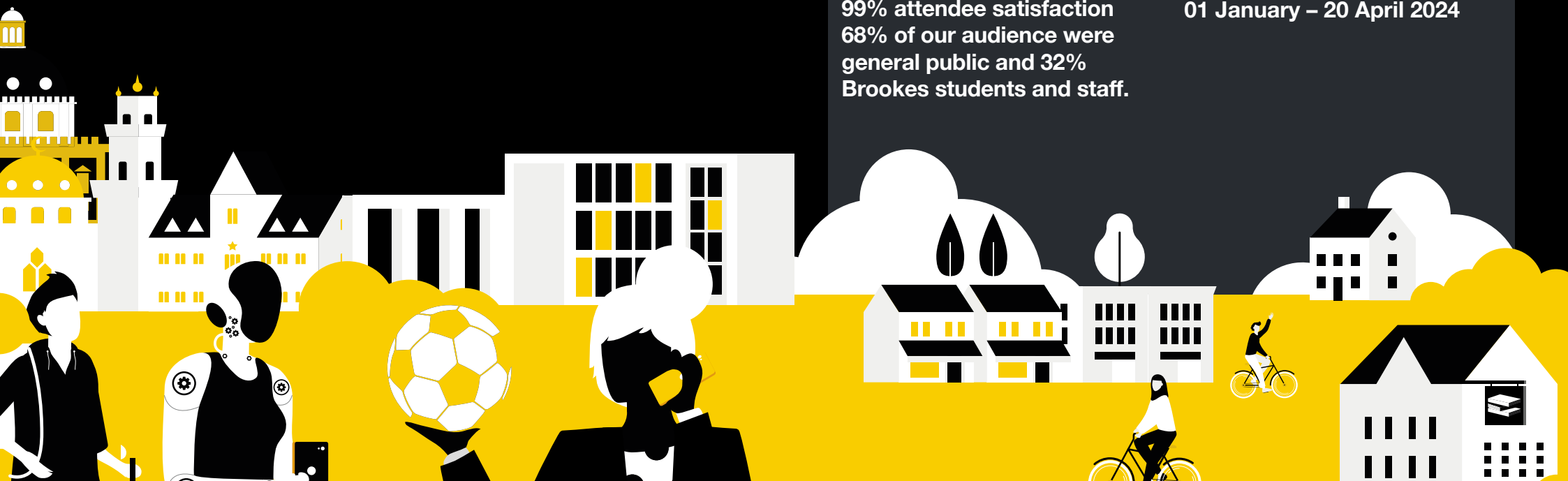
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16 free events
across 5 days delivered through interdisciplinary collaborations and community partnerships. Including contributions from 6 representatives of 4 of Oxford Brookes RIKE networks.

1,157 event registrations
over 900 attendees with 99% attendee satisfaction 68% of our audience were general public and 32% Brookes students and staff.

6,557,859 impressions
on Facebook / Instagram / Tik Tok / Youtube.
THF 24 Paid Social Campaign
11 March – 20 April 2024

54,696 impressions on Twitter
@thinkhumanfest posts
01 January – 20 April 2024



For 2024 we built on the success of our three previous festivals, deepening collaborations across the University and with our community partners. We developed interdisciplinary events exploring current themes such as moving from hostility to dignity for migrants and refugees, foregrounding remarkable female political thinkers, preserving access for all to our rights of way and examining our fascination with ghosts and hauntings. Think Human 2024 delivered face to face events, on campus and across the city, for public audiences, schools, students and staff.

Paterson Joseph, acclaimed actor, author and Chancellor of Oxford Brookes, opened Think Human 2024 with his show *Sancho & Me* at the Old Fire Station arts centre – one of the festival's long-term community partners. *Sancho & Me* is built around Paterson's debut novel *The Secret Diaries of Charles Ignatius Sancho* and explores ideas of belonging, education, slavery, commerce, violence, politics, music and love alongside Paterson's own story of being Black and British.



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What our audiences said

“Wonderful and thoughtful discussion, getting to the heart of things and demonstrating the value of humanities to the world.”

“There was a perfect balance of the history along with personal stories that moved me to ponder about the subject in a way I hadn’t before.”

“A very supportive environment, lots of interesting questions were asked and experiences shared. I am so pleased I went. It definitely added to my week in a positive way. Thank you.”

“Very accessible, personal, and tremendously moving talks!”

“The interactive art was exciting and really allowed me to explore the ideas of the event.”

“I enjoyed the entire event, from the dramatic readings to the in-depth explanations!”

“I thought this was exceptional. The panel was very good but what really made it special was the contribution from Martin Carthy which was very moving and powerful.”

“The talks and performances were all really enjoyable, and I appreciated the interactive elements.”

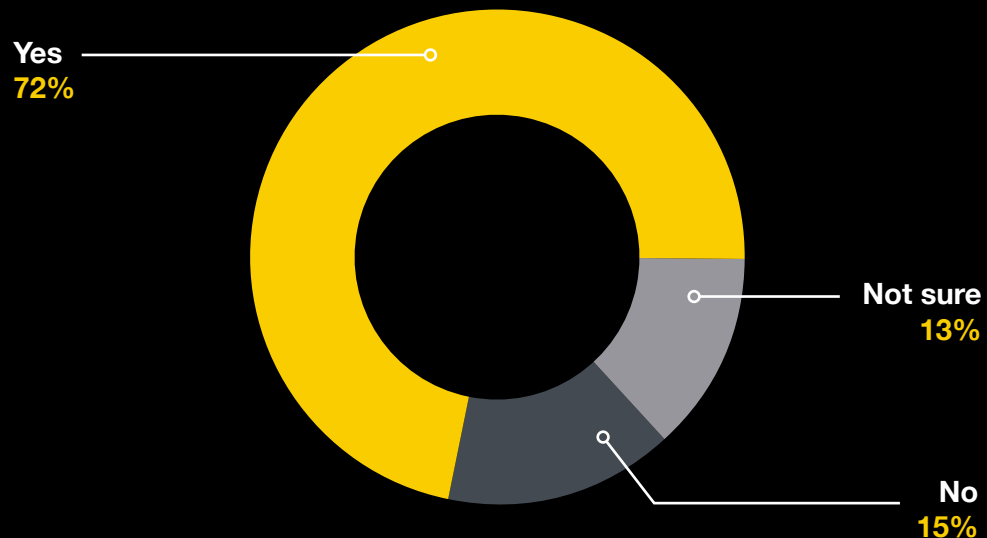
“I think it is the best event Brookes has ever organised. I’m beyond grateful it was stunning.”

“Just keep providing access to inspiring and creative spaces like this, so that people can take time out of our busy lives to think through important themes.”

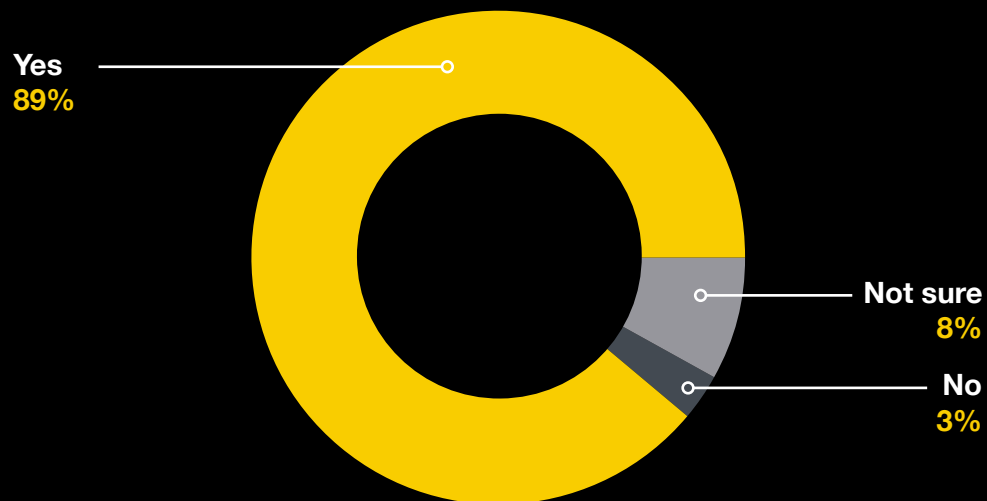


Attitude change feedback from our public audience

Has this event changed or challenged your thinking?

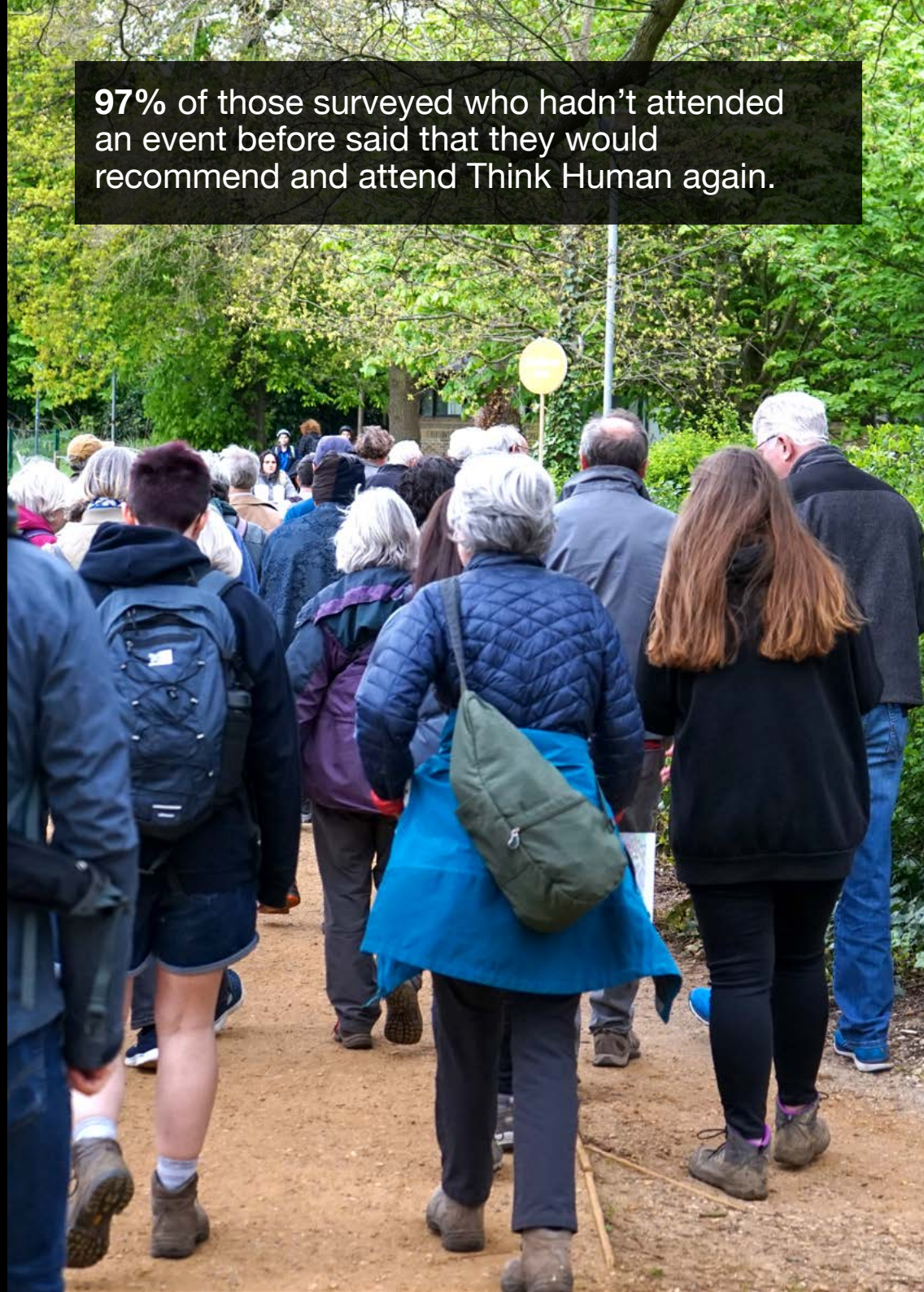


Did this event inspire you to find out more?



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97% of those surveyed who hadn't attended an event before said that they would recommend and attend Think Human again.



What our students said

“The programme was really informative, emotional and really made me realise what ‘Think Human’ meant.”

“This was an enriching experience as it not only allowed me to gain experience from helping out with guided walks to conversing with people interested in the topics covered, but also enabled me to learn about these topics myself. During these events, I met and spoke with numerous individuals with varying interests surrounding the themes of Think Human, which deepened my knowledge.”

“I had a positive experience. Finding out about other sectors of research whilst working the events and sharing my knowledge were both great.”

“I had such an amazing time! Everyone involved was so friendly and accommodating, and the experience was so much fun!”

“Enjoyed the walk, music concert, the talks with Iris Murdoch! Amazing experience!”

“I loved meeting people, especially Annette! (Badland).”

Think Human 2024 – The Student Experience

We held our first THF student launch for the 2024 programme in collaboration with Brookes Union and involved our team of Think Human Student Ambassadors much earlier in the process of promoting and representing Think Human Festival. THF Student Ambassadors led walks, set up events, welcomed visitors and joined in with activities both on campus and in community venues across the city. They met stars of stage and screen like Paterson Joseph, Annette Badland and Martin Carthy and, along with our community audiences, they witnessed moving testimonies at our Hostility to Dignity, Legacies of Eugenics and Motherhood events.

Our students gained incredible experience both supporting and contributing directly to our 2024 events. One of our English Literature and History of Art students, and committed member of Brookes Drama Society, acted as stage manager for Paterson Joseph’s show *Sancho & Me* at The Old Fire Station. Students on our Philosophy and Drama Theatre and Acting programmes acted scenes from *Hamlet* and gave dramatic readings from M.R.James at our Ghostly Encounters event.



“

Working as Stage Manager for *Sancho & Me* was a truly once in a lifetime opportunity. It gave me a chance to be involved in a project I never thought within my reach, and gave me invaluable experience.



What our colleagues said (Event Leads and Event Coordinators)

“I got to work with colleagues amongst the wider faculty team and got to use skills I wouldn’t normally get to use. I valued the interactions with other colleagues, academics and members of the public, I also learnt a lot.”

“The event felt positive because of the powerful and poignant response to the film (and play). The feedback also supports how powerfully the event was experienced and this has given me renewed energy/ the impetus I needed to do more.”

“It was a great team effort to pull the events together, and I really appreciated how we all helped each other out. The event leads and contributors were also fantastic and very responsive”

“It gave me an opportunity to publicly showcase the importance of the work I do and the value of humanities and social sciences. I also think that the relationships fostered in putting on the event were hugely positive and have huge potential in regard to future career development.”

“It was a pleasure to be involved in an event that was about a really important topic for society in general. The audience members were incredibly engaged throughout the event.”

“The event has hugely expanded relationships with third sector organisations across Oxfordshire, the University of Oxford, and the City and County Council.”

“The elements of the event all worked really well together, and the academic staff were great to work with. I think the audience really enjoyed it, and I was surprised at how many participated.”

“It was very positive. Think Human staff were very supportive and checked in regularly. It will help feed into applications for research funding for further workshops.”

“It promoted the research of the academics involved in the event and helped promote the valuable work going on amongst the local community who appreciated that it has direct and indirect benefits to them.”

“Think Human really is the best of Brookes: academics, administrators and students working together. I loved the two events I was involved in. The sheer range and creativity of Brookes staff and students was a joy, as was the willingness of the audience to participate.”

Think Human 2024 – The Staff Experience

Academic colleagues reached new audiences with their research, developed connections with colleagues from other disciplines and initiated or consolidated relationships with community partners. Many colleagues enhanced their knowledge exchange activity, supported and strengthened existing or developing Impact Case Studies, and fulfilled conditions of their research funding awards by developing and delivering events for the 2024 festival programme. The consistent evaluation of all Think Human Festival events usefully contributes to evidence gathering for the important research and knowledge exchange activity of our academic community.

Professional Services colleagues supporting the planning and delivery activities for the 2024 programme appreciated the opportunity to work as part of the Think Human Team and gained valuable event management and public and community engagement skills and experience. Colleagues appreciate that Think Human Festival creates a collegiate project team with a common aim – including staff, students, academic and professional services colleagues from across the University – collaborating with external partners and local communities to showcase the best of Brookes.

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2024 Programme Highlights



Changing Hearts & Minds with Music

This evening of live music and discussion in the John Henry Brookes Building centred on the theme of 'Changing Hearts and Minds with Music'. A packed audience enjoyed brilliant performances by local artists from across Oxfordshire, including Katie Grace Harris and The Balkan Wanderers. We were also joined by legendary folk artist Martin Carthy, who performed and participated in discussions with academics from Music, Psychology, Education and Politics on why, how and which songs have had a big impact on our lives.

“

I enjoyed everything about it, the music performances from Martin Carthy and The Balkan Wanderers, the discussion, the length of the event was just right, and the student ambassadors were charming.

The Scents of Love and Loss

In the beautiful setting of Barracks Lane Community Garden, this event explored the significance of smell in our experiences of love and loss. In collaboration with Oxfordshire Mind, attendees experienced various fragrances whilst discussing the social, cultural and emotional meaning of scent with Dr Sally Holloway (OBU) and Dr Will Tullett (University of York). They shared the scents that reminded them of lost loved ones and enjoyed some delicious pizza made with The Pizza Midwife. During the session, artists Jill Mueller and Julie Light led a creative workshop where the group crafted scented collage hearts inspired by historical and personal scents of love and loss.

“

Really engaging, informative and inclusive. I learned a lot and thought about scent for the first time.

🔄 You reposted



Al Kenny @3ddronedriver · Apr 19

...

There was a very special event @oxford_brookes University today. @ThinkHumanFest . The legend that is Martin Carthy gave the most beautiful insights into the essential force of music, and played with love and power. @elizacarthy

2024 Programme Highlights



Three Remarkable Women

This Think Human open lecture showcased Hannah Arendt, Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil, putting three remarkable political thinkers of the twentieth century centre stage. Prof Beverly Clack, Prof Gary Browning, (OBU), and Sasha-Lawson Frost, (Durham University), explored how these women framed radical thinking about politics based on their life experience. Celebrated actress Annette Badland brought their works to life through powerful readings, prompting the audience to reflect on their own lived experiences and politics.

“

Excellent combination of three speakers and an actor reading text extracts.

“

I went straight to the library after to get books on Iris Murdoch.

Motherhood

Dr Antonia Mackay and Professor Tina Miller curated a welcoming and accessible space, to discuss motherhood and its complexities in the post-Covid landscape. The session featured excerpts from the award-winning film based on Professor Tina Miller's research, and an extract from Dr Mackay's play *Three M'others*, performed by the brilliant Human Story Theatre. Addressing the digitalisation of maternal healthcare during the pandemic through real experiences of women who became mothers between 2020 and 2021, our audience shared their own motherhood journeys over tea and cake.

“

It was very thought provoking and reminded me of things I had forgotten about my own experience of motherhood in the pandemic but also highlighted what it was like for new mothers at that time – some of which I was totally unaware of.

You reposted



Jennifer Wong @jennywcreative · Apr 17

...

A talk at @ThinkHumanFest @oxfordbrookes on three women thinkers/writers (Iris Murdoch, Hannah Arendt & Simone Weil) raising important questions ahead of their times; & humanities (not just STEM!) changing the world.

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2024 Programme Highlights



The Lost Paths

The waiting list grew for this sold-out event, which took an enthusiastic group on a guided walk through Headington. The walk explored how rights of way are made, lost, and reclaimed before returning to campus for a conversation with Jack Cornish, Head of Paths at The Ramblers and author of *The Lost Paths: A History of How We Walk from Here to There*. Jack revealed the long history of pathmaking and discussed how to maintain access to these paths with our audience.



“

I thought the walk leader pitched it perfectly with just the right number of stops and pieces of information each time, the walk was the right length.

“

Fabulous facilities. Excellent speakers. Lots of time for interactive questions. A very uplifting session!



From Hostility to Dignity

Hosted by the Migration and Refugees Network, Dr Tamsin Barber and Dr Alex Powell developed an event addressing the UK's 'hostile environment' for migrants and refugees. In collaboration with NGO practitioners, charity and case workers, researchers, experts and the public, the event fostered links among groups dedicated to supporting migrant and refugee communities. Discussions focussed on sharing first-hand experiences and everyday challenges of working with migrants and refugees, alongside solution-focused work from researchers. Our audience's contributions centred on how we as a community can positively reshape the negative narrative surrounding migrants and refugees.

“

I enjoyed hearing from the various organisations working in Oxford alongside local council and government; their experiences working directly with refugees and how the local and wider community can help/support.

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Alexander Betts @alexander_betts · Apr 17

Fabulous @oxfordbrookes @ThinkHumanFest event last night, bringing together practitioners & academics across Oxford to work together for an inclusive City/County for refugees. Well done @APowellLaw & @tamsin_barber

2024 Programme Highlights



Ghostly Encounters

This sold-out interactive event at the Old Fire Station explored how ghost stories shape our personal and collective memories and imagination. Students from our Philosophy and Drama, Theatre, and Acting programmes brought ghostly tales to life, performing scenes from *Hamlet* and delivering haunting readings by M.R. James. Through theatre, talks, and art, the audience immersed themselves in ghostly encounters, even creating their own spectral artwork with artist Athena Kourbouzou.

“

Great to see these ideas manifesting in so many mediums: theatre, prose, art, film, photography. Three great researchers and communicators.

“

Fabulous acting, reading and talks. I want to read more MR James, watch more Shakespeare productions and find out more about Georgina Houghton.

Disability, ‘Unfit’ Bodies and Eugenic Stigma

Alongside an exhibition critically examining the impact of eugenics across time, Professor Marius Turda led two events focused on amplifying the voices of individuals affected by eugenic thinking. These events highlighted the damaging legacies of eugenics in today’s society in connection to disability, racism and the treatment of Romani communities. Our audiences were moved by the personal testimony of guest speakers Ramandeep Kaur, Terry-Lee Marttinen, John Henry Phillips and Terezia Rostas which led them to share their own experiences with us.

“

It was eye opening and with the guest speakers it really brought a personal touch to the topic. I thoroughly enjoyed every part of it.

“

Such an important subject!! Something that needs to be spoken about and I’m glad I attended the talk as I learnt so much.

Research contributions

Click the links to find out more about just some of the research showcased by Think Human Festival 2024

[The Lost Paths Walk](#)

[The Lost Paths Talk](#)

[Scents of Love and Loss](#)

[We are not Alone: Legacies of Eugenics](#)

[Disability “Unfit” Bodies and Eugenic Stigma](#)

[Motherhood: Exploring Maternal Experiences of the Pandemic in the Digital Age](#)

[Motherhood – Three M’others](#)

Key Contributors

Annette Badland, Actress

Athena Kourbouzou, Artist

Jack Cornish, Author and Head of Paths at The Ramblers

John Henry Philips, Archaeologist, Film-maker and Author

Julie Light and Jill Mueller, Artists

Martin Carthy, Singer and Guitarist

Paterson Joseph, Actor, Author, OBU Chancellor

Ramandeep Kaur, Disability Campaigner and Activist

Sasha Lawson-Frost, University of Durham

Terezia Rostas, Founder of Care for Young People’s Future and Welcoming Cultures UK

Terry-Lee Marttinen, OBU and Uppsala University

Dr Will Tullett, University of York

Community Collaborators

Asylum Welcome

Barracks Lane Community Garden

Human Story Theatre

Museum of Oxford

Old Fire Station, Oxford

Oxford City Council

Oxfordshire County Council

Oxford Samaritans

Oxfordshire Mind

Refugee Resource

Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford

Syrian Sisters

The Pizza Midwife

Turpin and Miller LLP

University of Oxford

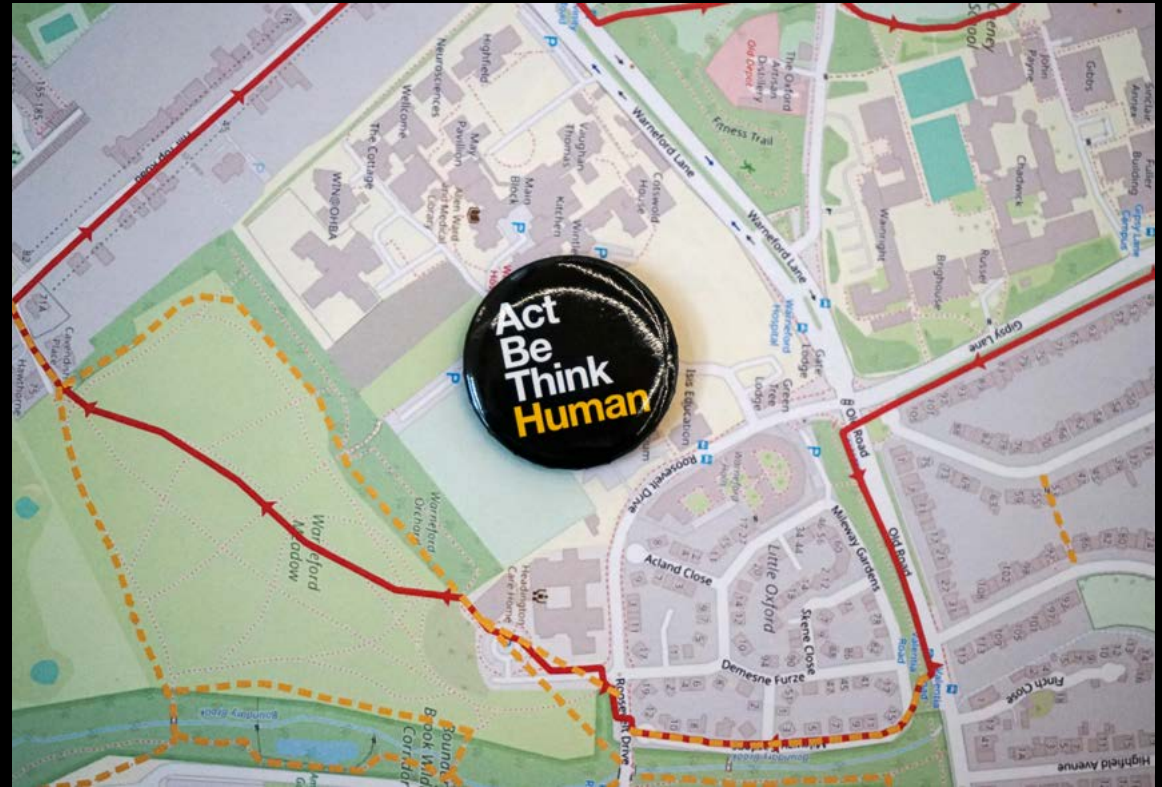


What's next?

Think Human is now recognised, inside and outside the University as a public engagement initiative that demonstrates the benefits of building and evolving mutually beneficial relationships with community partners, schools and public audiences.

The annual programme of research and teaching based content, created with input from a range of partners and collaborators has become as important as the biannual festival. We will continue to develop and build on this element of our work with the aim of showcasing the wider relevance of Oxford Brookes University's research, teaching and student engagement to the communities we are part of. The biannual festival will continue to provide a space to bring that work together and celebrate those collaborations and the benefits they generate for all of us.

For further information about Think Human contact Laura Baldock – Public Engagement Officer, Oxford Brookes University lsbaldock@brookes.ac.uk



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