

Thinking Ahead

[Lucy Furneaux](#) discusses 'The Story of Things' and the best events to inspire you at this year's York Festival of Ideas

Tuesday 13 June 2017

York's annual Festival of Ideas is the largest free festival in the UK. This month, the Festival is busy hosting 150 free events in the city and on campus, including talks, workshops, films, exhibitions and performances, all focused around this year's theme: 'The Story of Things'.

The Festival began in 2011, with the intention of showcasing work and research by York's academics, and highlighting the importance and relevance of higher education to today's world. Over the years, the Festival has grown in size and popularity; from hosting just over 20 events in the pilot six years ago, it now welcomes a huge number of speakers, performers and exhibitors, as well as thousands of audience members to its many events.

A partnership between the University and over 60 cultural, social and business organisations both in York and nationally, it aims to allow space for the general public to participate in open debate and discussion with academics and high-profile speakers. The debate element is crucial for organisers, leading to the Festival's four so-called 'Focus Days', which take a particular major contemporary issue and present talks, panels and workshops to explore them.

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This year's Focus Days consider the relationship between Britain and France following the election of President Emmanuel Macron; the question of whether democracy is under threat on account of fake news, right-wing extremism and other topics; the challenges facing our healthcare system, including tackling mental health and the future of the NHS; and the future of work, featuring a talk from Harriet Harman.

Since the pilot, every Festival has focused around a theme; in the past, these have ranged from 'Metamorphoses' in 2012, to 2014's 'Order and Chaos' and last year's 'Tick Tock'. The theme helps to focus the Festival, while also allowing for plenty of breadth and scope for exhibitors, performers and speakers to explore. However, alongside the Focus Days, the Festival itself is also organised into smaller sections or themes, which this year include 'A Moment in Music', 'Eoforwic: Anglian-era York', 'Russia in the Spotlight', 'A Date with History', 'The World in Motion', 'Revealing the Ancient World', 'Science: The Final Frontier' and more.

This year's theme is 'The Story of Things', which certainly provides plenty of scope. According to the Festival's programme, which can be found online or obtained for free from any York library, the aim of the theme is to celebrate “human ingenuity and invention”. Some events take the theme very literally, such as 'The Stories Behind Our Favourite Things' on Wednesday 14 June, looking at the role of objects in our understanding of meaning, while others are a little more nuanced, like 'Border: A Journey to the Edge of

family life with effortless humour, and his talk follows the recent release of his book, *Dad You Suck*.

However, the Festival isn't only about talks and panels. Its finale weekend also features the annual LUMA Film Festival, which champions the work of the University's up-and-coming filmmakers. Productions at LUMA have gone on to win national and international awards and acclaim, including BAFTA nominations. Alongside screening every film submitted, LUMA also holds film-focused workshops and talks for anyone with an interest in film production. Like so many other Festival of Ideas events, LUMA is entirely free and takes place on Hes East on 17 and 18 June.



One of the Festival's main focuses is in inclusiveness and accessibility. To highlight this, it features many events for specific age groups such as young children, including Wednesday 14 June's 'Zombies in York' event for eight-to-twelve year olds, in which attendees will watch a zombie dissection by University of York scientists and save the city from a zombie invasion. There are also events for teens, including acting workshops, and hands-on events for families.

The vast majority of Festival events are held on either of the University campuses or at easy-to-reach destinations in York city centre, making them more accessible to students than any other group. Student attendance is greatly encouraged by festival organisers: according to Joan Concannon, the Festival's director, "speakers are always hugely enthusiastic about networking with students and there are really great opportunities for students to generate new contacts."

Although by the time of printing the Festival will be in its final week, there are still plenty of events available to attend. Tickets can easily be downloaded from the Festival website, and although there may be tickets available on the door it is advised that attendees book in advance to ensure their space.

For more information and tickets, please visit the [Festival](#) and [LUMA](#) websites.



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