

ESC 2026

Speakers

Massimo Polidoro

Short bio: Journalist, author, university lecturer, and science communicator.

Talk theme: The Beatles (with a skeptical angle)

Lily O'Farrell

Short bio: Lily O'Farrell is a writer, cartoonist and feminist commentator. Her documentary podcast series, No Worries If Not! explores the intersection of culture, misinformation, the Internet, and wellness, with a focus on how these topics target and affect women.

Talk theme: How women can be radicalised by misinformation and internet culture

James Shakeshaft

Short bio: stand-up comedian, actor and writer who co-hosts the Loremen podcast about local legends and forgotten folklore.

Talk theme: Obscure British folklore, paranormal tales, and what they tell us about society

Onyeka Nubia

Short bio: pioneering and internationally recognised historian, writer and presenter.

Talk theme: interpreting the historical record using critical thinking, with a particular focus on the history of colonialism in Britain and Europe

Chantal den Daas

Short bio: leads the Health Psychology group at the University of Aberdeen. Her work spans social, behavioural, and health psychology, with a focus on understanding and changing health behaviours in infection and disease prevention, with a particular focus on sexual health

Talk theme: public health behaviour and effective management of infectious disease

Christina Pagel

Short bio: professor of operational research at University College London, using mathematical tools to support delivery of health services.

Talk theme: using data analysis and evidence-based policy to monitor and document how the trajectory of Trump's presidency is aligned with the authoritarian playbook.

Mike Wendling

Short bio: journalist who specialises in covering the US and international far-right, conspiracy theories and fringe movements and American politics

Talk theme: how conspiracy theories and digital disinformation influence how the public engage with political ideas and elections

Sheena Cruickshank

Short bio: immunologist and science communicator based at the University of Manchester

Talk theme: how the immune system interacts with beneficial things like the microbiome, versus threats such as infectious agents or harmful pollutants.

Jim Al-Khalili

Short bio: Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Physics at the University of Surrey and one of Britain's leading science communicators

Talk theme: On Time: The Physics That Makes the Universe Tick

Further biographies of our speakers can be found on our [speaker webpage](#) (two are still to be added, pending headshots).

Panels

Critical Thinking for Children

In an age of mis- and disinformation, strong critical thinking skills are more important than ever. Exposure to information in the digital age begins at school age, so how do we begin to equip children with the critical thinking skills required to protect them from mis- and disinformation? This panel will explore these themes.

Supplements and Peptides

As podcasters and social media influencers increasingly promote a variety of wellness practices, supplement stacking and injectable peptides are becoming trendy among certain online subcultures. This is especially apparent in the masculinity spaces where biohacking, self optimisation and looksmaxxing are promoted to young men. This panel will explore these topics.

Location, location, location

Does the location you find yourself in shape your beliefs? Or are we drawn to locations based on the beliefs we already hold? In this panel we'll explore how the communities forged in particular locations contribute to belief systems and what draws people to particular locations like Glastonbury and Sedona, or even online.

Saturday evening entertainment

Ockham Awards

The Ockham Awards are annual awards presented by The Skeptic to recognize achievements in skeptical activism, science communication, and the promotion of critical thinking and will be awarded as part of the evening entertainment.

Andy Zaltzman

Award winning comedian and 25-year veteran of the UK comedy circuit, Andy Zaltzman is the host of The Bugle Podcast, which he originally founded with John Oliver. Since 2020 he has been the host of BBC Radio 4's long-running satirical show The News Quiz; in the same year he became the official cricket statistician for the BBC's Test Match Special. In 2024, he was the winner of the eighteenth series of Channel 4's Taskmaster.

Ria Lina

A multi-award-winning comedian, actress, and writer, who was born to a Filipino mother and German father and was raised in the UK and the Netherlands. Ria has appeared in comedy shows across the British media, and also holds a BSc in Experimental Pathology, an MSc in Forensic Science, and a PhD in Virology.

[Hotel information](#)

ESC 2026 will taking place at the nautically-themed Liner Hotel in the heart of Liverpool, just 150m from Liverpool Lime Street train station. Many of the bedrooms at the Liner Hotel are already sold for the weekend of ESC 2026, but there are several other hotels within easy walking distance - we recommend the nearby [Raddison Red hotel](#), which is located just a couple of hundred metres away. This venue also has a number of wheelchair-accessible rooms, including roll-in showers, grab bars, and transfer seats.

The Liner Hotel is on Lord Nelson Street, just moments walk from Lime Street, Liverpool's main train station, with direct services from many UK cities. The hotel is also well-served by local bus routes and is within walking distance of many of Liverpool's attractions, including St George's Hall, the Empire Theatre, the World Museum, Tate Liverpool, the Albert Dock and the Cavern Club.

A paid car park is available on-site for guests and non-guests. It operates 24 hours a day using a cashless, numberplate-recognition system - simply enter on arrival and pay by contactless card before you leave.

Additional events

While the European Skeptics Congress takes place formally from Friday 16th October to Sunday 18th October, there will be a number of free events around the weekend, for those who wish to attend.

Thursday 15th October

Liverpool Skeptics in the Pub: Michael Marshall

Joe Rogan: The world's most influential misinformation super-spreader

Joe Rogan is one of the most listened to people on the planet, whose interviews and opinions influence tens of millions of people - yet, while he is regularly criticized for his views, it is often by people who have never actually listened to his show. Since 2025, Michael Marshall has listened to 250 hours of Joe Rogan, and has become an expert in what the world's most popular podcaster believes. Here, he will explain some of the dangerous ideas Joe Rogan spreads, the fringe pseudoscientific figures he promotes, and what harm his platform can do.

Michael Marshall is the President of the Merseyside Skeptics Society, Editor of The Skeptic magazine, and Project Director of the Good Thinking Society. In 2025, he launched the Know Rogan Experience podcast alongside co-host Cecil Cicirello, to track and debunk the world's most popular podcaster.

Venue: TBC

Friday 16th October

Skepticamp

Organised by the team behind Skeptics in the Pub Online, Skepticamp is a day-long event where members of the international skeptical community can volunteer to give a fifteen-minute talk on a skeptical subject of their choice. The event also takes place in the Liner Hotel and is free for all to attend, even if they do not hold a ticket to the main European Skeptics Congress. More information is available on [the Skepticamp website](#), including [how to volunteer to give a 15 minute presentation](#).

Sunday 18th October

ECSO board meeting

From 1600-1800, a meeting room is booked in the Liner Hotel for the ECSO board to meet. The room will be directly opposite the upstairs bar, and will be easily locatable.

Event Schedule

Please note, the order of speakers is subject to change based on travel/work requirements.

Thursday 15 Oct 2026

7:30pm - 10:00pm [Merseyside Skeptics Society - Skeptics in the Pub](#)

Friday 16 Oct 2026

11:00am - 4:00pm [SkeptiCamp](#)

7:00pm - 11:45pm [Mixer and pre-registration](#)

Saturday 17 Oct 2026

9:00am - 9:10am [Opening Ceremony](#)

9:10am - 9:50am [Massimo Polidoro](#)

10:10am - 10:50am [Lily O'Farrell](#)

11:10am - 11:50am [James Shakeshaft](#)

12:00pm - 1:00pm [\[Lunch break\]](#)

1:10pm - 1:50pm [Critical Thinking for Children](#)

2:10pm - 2:50pm [Supplements and Peptides](#)

3:10pm - 3:50pm [Onyeka Nubia](#)

4:10pm - 4:50pm [Chantal den Daas](#)

5:00pm - 6:30pm [\[Pre-dinner break\]](#)

6:30pm - 8:30pm [Congress Dinner \[for those with dinner tickets\]](#)

8:30pm - 8:45pm [Ockham Awards](#)

9:00pm - 9:45pm [Evening Entertainment](#)

9:45pm - 11:30pm [Social time](#)

Sunday 18 Oct 2026

10:00am - 10:10am [Welcome back](#)

10:10am - 10:50am [Christina Pagel](#)

11:10am - 11:50am [Mike Wendling](#)

12:00pm - 1:00pm [\[Lunch break\]](#)

1:10pm - 1:50pm [Location, Location, Location](#)

2:10pm - 2:50pm [Sheena Cruickshank](#)

3:10pm - 3:50pm [Jim Al-Khalili](#)

3:50pm - 4:00pm [Closing remarks](#)
