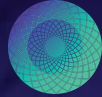




UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



Bennett School
of Public Policy

Bennett School of Public Policy

Annual Conference

Thursday 26 March 2026
Churchill College, Cambridge
Online

The right kind of growth fairly shared

FOREWORD

Welcome to delegates joining us in person and online.

At a time of profound geopolitical turbulence, the need for thoughtful, evidence-based public policy has never been greater. The Bennett School of Public Policy Annual Conference 2026 brings together policymakers, researchers, practitioners and commentators to reflect on the growing challenges shaping societies today and the ideas that can help address them.

This Conference showcases the latest research, practical experience and emerging insights from across academia, government, business and the media. Through expert discussions, a keynote lecture, poster presentations and opportunities for networking, the programme aims to foster dialogue between those who study policy and those who design and deliver it.

Throughout the day, experts will explore how to sustain evidence-based policymaking in polarised times; how artificial intelligence may transform public services; whether governments can deliver sustainable economic growth; and how Andy Burnham's policies in Greater Manchester – through devolution, place-based strategy, and attention to local identity – have helped make it the fastest-growing economy in England.

We are especially pleased to welcome our keynote speaker, Amb. João Vale de Almeida, who will speak on *The Divorce of Nations – New Geo-Strategic Challenges for Public Policy*.

We will also share the latest news on the Bennett School's bold new teaching programme – designed to prepare leaders for the most complex challenges – today and in the future.

We hope you enjoy the day and leave with ideas and perspectives that will inform and inspire your own work.

With best regards,

Prof Michael Kenny, Head of School

Prof Dame Diane Coyle, Research Director

PROGRAMME

TIME	SESSION
09:00–10:00	Registration & refreshments
10:00–10:15	Welcome
	<p>Sharon Peacock, Churchill College, University of Cambridge Michael Kenny, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge Peter Bennett, Peter Bennett Foundation</p>
10:15–11:30	Evidence-based policymaking in polarised times
	<p>SPEAKERS: Ottoline Leyser, Department of Plant Sciences, University of Cambridge Ehsan Masood, Nature, UK Jennifer Rubin, King's College London School for Government CHAIR: Diane Coyle, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge</p>
11:30–12:00	Refreshment break & poster presentations
12:00–13:15	AI and public services
	<p>SPEAKERS: Jessica Montgomery, ai@cam, University of Cambridge Fay Skevington, Department for Education Antonio Weiss, The PSC CHAIR: Aleksei Turobov, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge</p>
13:15–14:15	Lunch & poster presentations
14:15–15:15	Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham in conversation
	<p>SPEAKER: Andy Burnham, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) CHAIRS: Diane Coyle, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge Michael Kenny, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge</p>
15:15–15:45	Refreshment break
15:45–17:00	Can governments deliver growth?
	<p>SPEAKERS: Sam Bowman, Works in Progress Zach Meyers, Centre on Regulation in Europe Anna Valero, London School of Economics CHAIR: Alessio Terzi, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge</p>
17:00–17:15	Short break
17:15–18:15	Keynote: The divorce of nations – new geo-strategic challenges for public policy
	<p>SPEAKER: João Vale de Almeida, Former Senior European Union Ambassador CHAIR: Suzanne Raine, Selwyn College, University of Cambridge</p>
18:15–18:20	Closing remarks
	<p>Diane Coyle, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge</p>
18:20–19:15	Drinks reception

WELCOME



Peter Bennett

Founding benefactor of the Peter Bennett Foundation

Peter Bennett is the founding benefactor of the Peter Bennett Foundation (2013) and the Bennett School of Public Policy at Cambridge (founded in 2018 as the Bennett Institute for Public Policy). Graduating in 1978, he read Economics at Churchill College.

Following a successful career in banking and hedge fund management, Peter now pursues philanthropic projects promoting poverty reduction and equality.

The Peter Bennett Foundation also established the Bennett Institute for Applied Data Science at the University of Oxford (2021), and has supported the new Whittle Laboratory (2022), the Science Museum (2023), and the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex (2023).



Sharon Peacock

Master, Churchill College

Sharon Peacock is Master of Churchill College, Cambridge and Professor of Microbiology at the University of Cambridge. Her research career has focused on pathogen genomics, antimicrobial resistance, and tropical diseases. She directed the COVID-19 Genomics UK Consortium, formed in April 2020 to provide SARS-CoV-2 genomes during the pandemic response. She is a Fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences and the American Academy of Microbiology, and an elected Member of the European Molecular Biology Organization. Sharon received a CBE for services to medical microbiology in 2015; the Medical Research Council Millennium Medal in 2021; and the Marjorie Stephenson Prize for exceptional contributions to microbiology in 2023.

Michael Kenny

Inaugural Head, Bennett Professor of Public Policy, University of Cambridge

See bio on pg.10.

KEYNOTE

The divorce of nations – new geo-strategic challenges for public policy

How is today's geopolitical and geoeconomic turbulence affecting governments and policymakers? To answer this increasingly important question, João Vale de Almeida will draw on the key arguments set out in his recent book, *The Divorce of Nations*.

SPEAKER:



João Vale de Almeida

Former Senior European Union Ambassador

João Vale de Almeida is a former senior European Union Ambassador who retired in 2023 after a 40-year career. His final posting was in London (2020–2022) as the first post-Brexit EU Ambassador to the UK. Previously he was Ambassador to the United Nations (2015–2019) and Ambassador to the United States (2010–2014).

Since his retirement, Ambassador Vale de Almeida has been active as an Adjunct Professor and a Visiting Fellow at the University of Columbia, New York, and at the University of Cambridge.

He is a member of the Strategic Council of the European Policy Centre (Brussels), and a trustee of the Oceano Azul Foundation (Lisbon).

His first book, *The Divorce of Nations: A Diplomat's Inside View as the Global Order Collapses*, was published in the UK in 2025.

CHAIR:



Suzanne Raine

Master, Selwyn College, University of Cambridge

Suzanne Raine is the Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge. She served for 24 years in the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office on foreign policy and national security issues, including postings in Poland, Iraq and Pakistan. She was Head of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre from 2015–2017 and Director of Counter-Terrorism from 2017–2019. Since leaving the civil service in 2019 she has engaged with academia through the Centre for Geopolitics in Cambridge and as a Visiting Professor at Kings College London. She writes and lectures on risk analysis, anticipation and warning.

DECISION-MAKING

Evidence-based policymaking in polarised times

SPEAKERS:



Ottoline Leyser

Regius Professor of Botany,
University of Cambridge

Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser is Regius Professor of Botany at the University of Cambridge. She has a long-term interest in science policy. From 2020–2025 she served as CEO of UK Research and Innovation. She has for many years been involved in a range of activities aimed at making science more accessible and inclusive; integral to this endeavour is work within the science community to drive changes in research culture. In 2017 she was awarded a DBE for services to plant science, science in society and equality and diversity in science.



Ehsan Masood

Bureau Chief (Editorials, Africa and the
Middle East), Nature

Ehsan Masood is a science journalist. Since 2019 he has been Nature's Editor for Editorials and also has responsibility for the journal's news coverage from Africa and the Middle East.

Ehsan taught science and innovation policy at Imperial College for a decade until 2017 and is the author of a number of books. His latest book is *GDP: The World's Most Powerful Formula and Why it Must Now Change* (2021).

Ehsan also makes documentary programmes for BBC Radio 4. These include *Science: Right or Left?*, which explores why people who vote for right-wing parties are becoming less trusting of evidence and expertise.

This panel will examine how to sustain rigorous, data-driven policy decision-making in an era of political polarisation and declining public trust. Panellists will explore the impact of misinformation, ideology, and the growing politicisation of expertise, alongside the pitfalls in the selective use of evidence. The discussion will cover issues such as strengthening institutional resilience through transparency, methodological integrity, and clearer public communication. It will also consider the responsibilities of academics, civil servants, and independent bodies in keeping evidence central to policymaking in today's highly contested political environments.

CHAIR:



Jennifer Rubin

Chair, King's College London School for Government

Professor Jennifer Rubin CBE is Chair of the King's College London School for Government. She has led and funded multidisciplinary, multi-country research institutes and programmes across academia, the public and non-profit sectors for over twenty years.

In December 2025, Jennifer completed a five-year term as Home Office Director General, Science, Technology, Analysis and Research (STAR) and Home Office Chief Scientific Adviser.

Jennifer's principal research interests have included migration, integration and intolerance; emerging technology and security; and the intersections between public health and related areas such as violence, alcohol and drugs policy. She received a CBE in the King's New Year's Honours for services to science and analysis.



Diane Coyle

Bennett Professor of Public Policy, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge

Professor Dame Diane Coyle is Bennett Professor of Public Policy at the Bennett School of Public Policy in Cambridge.

Her own research focuses on productivity, the digital economy and AI policy, and economic measurement. The underlying motivation for all her work is the question: what does it mean for the economy to improve, and who benefits?

Diane is currently a member of the UK Government's Industrial Strategy Council, and advises the Competition and Markets Authority. She has served previously in a number of public service roles including Vice Chair of the BBC Trust. Diane was awarded a DBE in 2023 for her contribution to economics and public policy. Her latest book is *The Measure of Progress: Counting What Really Matters* (2025).

PRODUCTIVITY

AI in public services

SPEAKERS:



Jessica Montgomery

Director, ai@cam,
University of Cambridge

Jessica Montgomery is currently Director of ai@cam, a new University of Cambridge strategic mission to develop AI technologies that serve science, citizens, and society.

Alongside this role, she leads a variety of research and policy programmes tackling the real-world challenges associated with developing and deploying AI for societal benefit. These include Accelerate Science; the Data Trusts Initiative; and strategic research agenda development for the ELISE/ELLIS network of European AI research.

Her interests in AI and its consequences for science and society stem from her policy career, in which she worked with parliamentarians, leading researchers and civil society organisations to bring scientific evidence to bear on major policy issues.



Fay Skevington

Head of AI Alignment for Education,
Department for Education

Fay Skevington is Head of AI Alignment for Education in the UK Government's Department for Education.

In January 2026, Fay delivered the UK's Global Summit on Generative AI for Education, and published national safety standards for AI which recognise education as a high-stakes environment requiring stronger protections for children.

In developing AI safety and data policy, Fay's work uses participatory methods to centre the voices of children, educators, and civil society in decisions, ensuring that those most affected by new technologies help shape how they are designed, used, and overseen.

Fay holds a BA from Oxford, an MBA from Cranfield, and is currently completing an MSc in Artificial Intelligence.

The UK government is ambitiously positioning artificial intelligence as a primary engine for public-sector productivity and improved citizen outcomes. Yet, as the push toward deployment accelerates, a fundamental operational challenge emerges: navigating the complex trade-offs between rapid, scalable efficiency and the strict requirements of public acceptability, accountability, and trust. This session interrogates the practical realities of AI deployment, exploring how the public sector can harness innovation to deliver better services while upholding the social contract.

CHAIR:



Antonio Weiss
AI & digital expert, The PSC

Dr Antonio Weiss is an Affiliated Researcher at the Bennett School, and author of *AI Demystified* (2025).

He is a Senior Partner at The PSC, a public services consultancy, advising senior clients on AI, user-centred design, innovation thinking, and utilising technology to redesign public services to meet citizens’ needs.

Antonio sits on the UK Government Digital Service Responsible AI Advisory Panel, and was previously Senior Advisor to the office of the now UK Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, advising on public service reform and technology.

He holds a PhD in History from Birkbeck, University of London, and a Bachelor’s Degree and MPhil in History from the University of Cambridge.



Aleksei Turobov
Assistant Professor, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge

Dr Aleksei Turobov is an Assistant Professor at the Bennett School of Public Policy in Cambridge. His research examines the critical gap between the global ambitions of AI policy and the practical realities of its implementation.

He leads research for the AIxGeo project, using an approach that combines AI-driven thematic analysis with network analysis to map the emergent coalitions and narratives shaping international AI policy and governance.

By connecting global strategy to institutional practice, his work generates an evidence-based understanding of how institutions can adapt in the age of AI. He holds a PhD in Political Science and was previously a Postdoctoral Fellow in Cybersecurity and Technology Policy at Northumbria University.

PROGRESS

Can governments deliver growth?

SPEAKERS:



Sam Bowman

Founding Editor, *Works in Progress*

Sam Bowman is a founding editor of *Works in Progress*, a magazine of new and underrated ideas to improve the world. It was founded in 2020 and acquired by Stripe in 2022, where he is now also head of publishing and oversees Stripe Press, which recently sold its millionth book.

He is the author of influential essays including *The Housing Theory of Everything* and *Foundations: Why Britain Has Stagnated*. He is also a board member of the Mercatus Centre at George Mason University, US.



Zach Meyers

Director of Research,
Centre on Regulation in Europe

Zach Meyers is Director of Research at the Centre on Regulation in Europe (CERRE) and an Associate Fellow of the Centre for European Reform. His research covers economic regulation and network industries such as telecoms, energy, payments, financial services and airports, along with the EU's strategies to increase its economic competitiveness. He was previously a competition and regulatory lawyer in Australia, the US and the UK, where he consulted to governments, regulators and multilateral institutions on competition policy and reforms in regulated sectors. Zach holds a BA, LLB and a Master of Public & International Law from the University of Melbourne, Australia.

Panellists will examine the role of the state in driving sustainable economic expansion in an era of fiscal constraint, geopolitical uncertainty, and structural change. They will debate whether governments can actively shape growth through industrial strategy, public investment, skills policy, and innovation support, or whether their role is primarily to create stable market conditions. The discussion will explore trade-offs between growth, inequality, and environmental sustainability, as well as the limits imposed by debt and political cycles. Ultimately, the session will consider what kind of state capacity, leadership, and institutional reform are required to achieve long-term, inclusive growth.

CHAIR:



Anna Valero

Professor in Practice and Director of the Growth Programme at the Centre for Economic Performance, LSE

Anna Valero is a Professor in Practice and Director of the Growth Programme at the Centre for Economic Performance, LSE; Deputy Director of the Programme on Innovation and Diffusion (POID); and an Associate of the Grantham Research Institute. She was a member of the Steering Group of the Resolution Foundation-CEP Economy 2030 Inquiry; and a Research Director for the LSE Growth Commission. Anna is currently serving as Industrial Strategy Adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves. She is a member of the Royal Economic Society Council for the period 2024–2029.

Anna completed her PhD in Economics at the LSE in 2018, having started her career in Deloitte audit and economic consulting.



Alessio Terzi

Assistant Professor, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge

Dr Alessio Terzi is Assistant Professor at the Bennett School of Public Policy, Cambridge, where he also directs the MPhil in Public Policy, and is an Adjunct Professor in Economics at Sciences Po in Paris. He is a member of the World Economic Forum Global Future Council on Equitable Transition.

For over five years, he was an Economist at the Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs of the European Commission, where he worked on competitiveness, industrial policy, beyond GDP, and the macroeconomics of the European Green Deal.

His book *Growth for Good: Reshaping Capitalism to Save Humanity from Climate Catastrophe* was published in 2022.

PLACE

Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham in conversation

SPEAKER:



Andy Burnham

Mayor of Greater Manchester

Andy Burnham has been Mayor of Greater Manchester since 2017. He was re-elected to serve a third term in May 2024.

Prior to becoming Mayor, Andy served for 16 years as MP for Leigh. In government, he has held Ministerial positions at the Home Office, Department of Health, and Treasury. In 2008 he became Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, before returning to Health as Secretary of State in 2009.

In opposition, Andy has served as Shadow Education Secretary, Shadow Health Secretary and Shadow Home Secretary.

Andy's priorities for his third term include continuing to build a London-style integrated transport system, ending the housing crisis, and creating a new Live Well service, making Greater Manchester a great place to grow up, get on, and grow old.

CHAIRS:



Michael Kenny

Inaugural Head, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge

Professor Michael Kenny is Head of Department at the Bennett School of Public Policy in Cambridge.

He is a visiting Fellow at the UCL Constitution Unit and a member of the advisory board of the Constitution Society. In 2021 he was made a Fellow of the UK's Academy of the Social Sciences. As well as being a Professor of Public Policy at Cambridge, he is a Professorial Fellow at Fitzwilliam College.

His research interests include public policy; governance and devolution; territorial politics; British politics and political ideas.

He is currently writing *The World Island: How Britain's Relationship with the Seas has Shaped its Politics and Government*, with Nick Pearce, which will examine the policy and ideological implications of shifting conceptions of the UK as a maritime state.

Diane Coyle

Bennett Professor of Public Policy, Bennett School of Public Policy, University of Cambridge

See bio on pg.5.

Greater Manchester has frequently been cited as one of the UK's most dynamic city-regions, with strong performance in employment, investment, innovation and urban regeneration. For the past 20 years it has also been at the forefront of English devolution, gaining new powers over transport, housing, skills and health. This conversation with Mayor Andy Burnham will explore the extent to which policy choices at the city-region level have accelerated growth, what role local political leadership has played, and what lessons other regions can draw from Greater Manchester's model.

CONFERENCE NOTES:

RESEARCH PROJECT POSTERS

By addressing pressing policy challenges through rigorous research and analysis, the Bennett School of Public Policy contributes to informed decision-making processes at different levels of governance and society.

Our researchers look forward to discussing their work with you during the refreshment breaks.

Owen Garling

Knowledge Transfer Facilitator

Beth Kitson

Research Associate

Shaping the climate of ideas: knowledge and engagement at the Bennett School

How can research and engagement shape how policy problems are understood and addressed? In complex policy environments, shaping policy requires strong relationships and sustained, question-driven inquiry spanning disciplines and sectors. Here we examine how knowledge is generated, shared, and applied through research, engagement, and impact at the Bennett School.

Nghi Nguyen

Research Assistant

More than just Plug and Play: early evidence on organisational capital and AI adoption

Our study uses unique survey data from UK companies to investigate how structured management is associated with early adoption of AI. We find that better managed companies are more likely to use AI, accounting for business characteristics such as age, size, industry and location.

Start-ups and scale-ups in UK technology sectors

In this policy brief, we examine the strengths and weaknesses of the UK's start-up ecosystem. More specifically, we discuss the three system-building factors (access to markets, access to talent, knowledge clusters and network); funding opportunities; and exits and scaling up strategies.

John Lourenze Poquiz

Research Associate

From reviews to real output

Quality adjustment for services in national accounts is hampered by intangible, hard-to-measure characteristics. This paper uses sentiment analysis of hotel reviews from Trustpilot to construct service quality indices and adjust official UK accommodation price deflators. Results show conventional deflators overstate real output growth during 2015–2019 by conflating quality decline with disinflation.

Whose economic growth?

US GDP growth appears exceptional compared to European peers, but excluding top earners reveals a different story. When income of the top 10% is removed, UK and German growth nearly matches US rates (2013-2023). This suggests official figures mask inequality's role, with most Americans experiencing far more modest gains.

Burcu Sevde Selvi
Research Assistant

Understanding creative industry growth: evidence from national trends and Creative UK's portfolio

This research explores the growing economic and social impact of the UK creative industries, examining how definitions and data shape understanding of the sector and highlighting challenges around measurement, finance and regional disparities. Drawing on national trends and Creative UK's investment portfolio, it examines how targeted investment and policy can support inclusive, place-sensitive growth.

From school to work: tackling skills mismatch and building pathways for young people in East Anglia

East Anglia faces a persistent skills mismatch, limiting young people's successful transition from school to work. Strong labour demand in clean energy, digital and innovation sectors contrasts with weaker educational participation and limited technical pathways in many parts of the region. This work explores local gaps and areas for improvement to inform policy discussion.

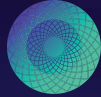
Aleksei Turobov
Assistant Professor

Pragmatic pluralism: how the global majority is building AI governance

The global majority is not waiting for the US, EU or China to settle AI governance. Analysis of 327 policy documents from APEC, ASEAN, the African Union, and G20 reveals a pragmatic pluralism: different regulatory tools achieve equivalent outcomes, capacity-building is a governance mechanism, and shared problems drive cooperation.



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