UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Bennett Institute for Public Policy Cambridge

Bennett Institute for Public Policy

Annual Conference

Friday 28 March 2025 | Churchill College, Cambridge / Online

Exploring real-world solutions to some of the biggest public policy challenges facing governments and citizens today.

WELCOME

Welcome to the Bennett Institute for Public Policy Annual Conference 2025 – in Cambridge and online.

We are pleased to bring together delegates from the worlds of government, business, civil society and academia.

This is a valuable opportunity for us to share our work and to hear leading practitioners, academic thinkers and policy experts from interdisciplinary backgrounds explore some of the most pressing public policy challenges facing governments and citizens around the world.

The sessions are organised under the Bennett Institute's thematic headings of – Place, Progress, Productivity, and Decision-making in government – with the aim of hearing experts share practical solutions for creating a more just, equal and sustainable world.

We are grateful to everyone for joining us today and for taking part in valuable conversations – both on and off the stage.

We are especially pleased to welcome our keynote speaker, Professor Sander van der Linden, to discuss how we can immunise ourselves against disinformation.

We will also be sharing a little more about our plans for the forthcoming Bennett School of Public Policy, set to open in Autumn 2025.

We hope that today's discussions will interest and inspire you in your work to create meaningful change in people's lives.

Diane Coyle DBE, Bennett Professor of Public Policy
Michael Kenny, Professor of Public Policy

Co-Directors of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy

PROGRAMME

TIME	SESSION
09:00–09:40	**Registration & refreshments**
09:45–10:00	**Welcome**
	Sharon Peacock, Master, Churchill College **Michael Kenny**, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge **Peter Bennett**, Peter Bennett Foundation
10:00–11:15	**Do wicked problems need wicked solutions?**
	SPEAKERS: **Laura Diaz Anadon**, Centre for Environment, Energy and Natural Resource Governance, University of Cambridge **Shailaja Fennell**, Department of Land Economy, University of Cambridge **Gordon Harold**, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge CHAIR: **Dennis Grube**, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge
11:15–11:45	**Refreshments & poster presentations**
11:45–13:00	**The investment imperative: what strategies are needed to fund competitiveness, defence, and sustainability?**
	SPEAKERS: **Diane Coyle**, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge **Flavio Toxvaerd,** Faculty of Economics, University of Cambridge **Guntram Wolff**, Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and Bruegel CHAIR: **Alessio Terzi**, Department of Politics & International Studies, University of Cambridge
13:00–14:00	**Lunch & poster presentations**
14:00–15:15	**Rethinking work: What does it take to build a productive and healthy society?**
	SPEAKERS: **Kate Bell**, Trade Union Congress (TUC) **Brendan Burchell**, Faculty of Human, Social and Political Sciences, University of Cambridge **Sarah O'Connor**, Financial Times CHAIR: **Nina Jörden**, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge
15:15–15:45	**Refreshments & poster presentations**
15:45–17:00	**Tackling political disenchantment in 'forgotten about' places: what should governments try now?**
	SPEAKERS: **Andrés Rodríguez-Pose**, London School of Economics **Jessica Studdert**, New Local **Tom Walker**, Essex County Council CHAIR: **Michael Kenny**, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge
17:00–17:15	**Short break**
17:15–18:20	**Keynote lecture: Psychological inoculation against misinformation**
	SPEAKER: Sander van der Linden, Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge **CHAIR: Diane Coyle**, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge
18:15–18:20	**Closing remarks**
	Diane Coyle, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge
18:20–19:30	**Drinks reception**

Do wicked problems need wicked solutions?

SPEAKERS:

Laura Diaz Anadon

Chaired Professor of Climate Change Policy, Director of CEENRG, University of Cambridge

Prof Laura Diaz Anadon is the chaired Professor of Climate Change Policy, Director of the Cambridge Centre for Environment, Energy and Natural Resource Governance (CEENRG), and a Fellow of St. John's College at the University of Cambridge. She is an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Lead Author, Vice-Chair of the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change and on the Board of Directors of Cambridge Enterprise. Her research awards include the XVII Fundacion Banco Sabadell Prize for Economic Research, a Tsinghua Distinguished Visiting Professorship and a JM Keynes Fellowship Fund Senior Fellowship.

Shailaja Fennell

Professor of Economic Security and Resilience, Department of Land Economy, University of Cambridge

Shailaja Fennell is Professor of Economic Security and Resilience in the Department of Land Economy. She is a fellow of Jesus College, and also Director of the Centre of South Asian Studies. Shailaja was the global lead on an ASEAN funded project (2019-2021), and with her core Cambridge-based team was responsible for designing the framework, commissioning over 50 global experts and compiling the latest research to deliver the first ASEAN Development Outlook, a publication that focused on policies to ensure inclusion and sustainability in South-East Asia.

With the complexity of policy issues seemingly ever increasing, what reforms does government need to undertake if it is to fully get to grips with issues in areas like climate change, mental health, and food security? Whilst there has been mounting recognition of the 'wicked' nature of these problems, there is much less certainty on what the solutions might be, and what the role of government might be in providing them. Should we accept that wicked problems are now simply too big to solve, or do we require a new leap of imagination to conjure solutions that match the complexity of the problems themselves?

CHAIR:

Gordon Harold

Inaugural Professor of the Psychology of Education and Mental Health, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

Gordon Harold is the inaugural Professor of the Psychology of Education and Mental Health at the University of Cambridge, having previously held appointments as the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Chair and Professor of Psychology at the University of Sussex, the Alexander McMillan Chair and Professor of Childhood Studies at the University of Otago (NZ), and Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at Cardiff University. His research focuses on family dynamics' impact on child and adolescent mental health, the genetic-family interplay, and promoting evidence-based practices and policies to improve mental health outcomes globally.

Dennis Grube

Professor of Politics and Public Policy, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge

Dennis C. Grube is Professor of Politics and Public Policy at the University of Cambridge and research lead in political decision-making at the Bennett Institute for Public Policy. His research interests include political decision-making, administrative leadership, institutional memory, and the role of political rhetoric in public policy. Recent books include his monograph 'Megaphone Bureaucracy', (Princeton University Press, 2019), and 'Comparing cabinets: The dilemmas of collective government' (Oxford University Press, 2021) co-authored with Professor Patrick Weller and Professor Rod Rhodes. His latest book, Why Governments Get It Wrong? (Pan, 2023), is now available in paperback.

The investment imperative: what strategies are needed to fund competitiveness, defence, and sustainability?

SPEAKERS:

Diane Coyle

Bennett Professor of Public Policy and Co-Director, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge

Diane Coyle is the Bennett Professor of Public Policy at the University of Cambridge. She co-directs the Bennett Institute of Public Policy where she heads research under the themes of progress and productivity. Diane's new book (April 2025) is 'The Measure of Progress: Counting what really matters' (Princeton University Press). Her research focuses on productivity, the digital economy and digital policy, and economic measurement. Diane is also a member of the UK Government's Industrial Strategy Council, New Towns Taskforce, and advises the Competition and Markets Authority. Diane was awarded a DBE in 2023 for her contribution to economics and public policy.

Flavio Toxvaerd

Professor of Economics and Public Policy, Faculty of Economics, University of Cambridge

Flavio Toxvaerd is Professor of Economics and Public Policy at the Faculty of Economics, University of Cambridge and a fellow of Clare College. He is the Founding Director of the Cambridge Initiative for Market Studies and a Member of the Economic Advisory Group on Competition Policy of the European Commission. He is currently the inaugural UKRI Policy Fellow in Competition and Productivity Economics, and an affiliated researcher at the Bennett Institute for Public Policy.

Both Europe and the UK share common challenges, such as weak productivity growth, and sliding competitiveness, together with broader concerns such as climate change and weak defence spending in a worsening geopolitical environment. For all of these issues, greater investment has been identified as a fundamental tool. Several questions remain unanswered however: what share of the investment gap can credibly be filled by the public sector? Are flanking reforms needed to ensure money is well spent and to crowd in private investment? How does this interact with fiscal rules when the world is reaching all-time-high public debt levels?

CHAIR:

Guntram Wolff

Professor of Economics, Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and Bruegel

Guntram Wolff is Professor of Economics at the Solvay Brussels School of Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB). He is also a senior fellow at Bruegel, which he directed from 2013–2022. From 2022–2024, he was the director of the German Council on Foreign Relations. His research focuses on European integration, climate policy, geo- and defence economics, macro-economics. He regularly advises European Union finance ministers and national parliaments and has published in leading journals such as Nature, Energy Policy, Climate Policy, Journal for European Public Policy, Foreign Affairs. He holds a PhD in economics from the University of Bonn.

Alessio Terzi

Lecturer in Public Policy, Department of Politics & International Studies, University of Cambridge

Dr Alessio Terzi is a Lecturer in Public Policy at Cambridge University and an Adjunct Professor in Economics at Sciences Po and HEC Paris. Over more than five years at the Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs of the European Commission, he helped design the overall economic strategy associated with the European Green Deal. Prior to that, he was a Fellow at Bruegel, the leading European economic think-tank, and a Fulbright Scholar at the John F. Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University. He has work experience from the European Central Bank and BMI Research (Fitch Ratings).

Rethinking work: what does it take to build a productive and healthy society?

SPEAKERS:

Kate Bell

Assistant General Secretary, Trade Union Congress (TUC)

Kate Bell is Assistant General Secretary and supports Paul Nowak in leading the Trade Union Congress (TUC). Kate joined the TUC in 2016 as the organisation's head of economics, international and employment rights department. Before joining the TUC, Kate worked as Head of Policy and Public Affairs for a local authority. She has also worked for the Labour Party, and for the charities Child Poverty Action Group and Gingerbread.

Brendan Burchell

Professor of the Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge

Brendan Burchell is the Professor of the Social Sciences in the Department of Sociology at the University of Cambridge. His main research interests centre on the effects of labour market conditions on wellbeing. Recent publications have focused on reduced hours working, unemployment, job insecurity, work intensity and part-time work. He works in interdisciplinary environments with psychologists, sociologists, economists, geographers, lawyers and other social scientists. For the past few years, his research has mainly focused on Work Time Reduction / the Four-Day Week.

Work is much more than a means to an end – it shapes our identity, values, social status, and how we spend our lives. As a central principle of society, work underpins individual wellbeing, collective resilience, and societal progress. Yet the nature of work is undergoing profound changes, driven by technological advances, shifting societal values and the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, the UK's longstanding productivity challenge remains unresolved. This panel will explore how we can balance productivity, fairness, and wellbeing to create work that is sustainable, meaningful, and productive for individuals, organisations, and society.

Sarah O'Connor

Columnist and Associate Editor, Financial Times

Sarah O'Connor is a columnist and associate editor at the Financial Times. She writes about work, technology and economics. She studied social and political sciences at Cambridge University and joined the FT in 2007. Her work has been awarded a British Press Award, a Foreign Press Association award, the Wincott Award for Financial Journalism and the Orwell Prize for Exposing Britain's Social Evils.

CHAIR:

Nina Jörden

Research Associate, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge

Dr Nina Jörden is a Research Associate at the Bennett Institute, specialising in the study of organisational structures, processes, and practices. Her research is driven by three central themes: productivity; quality of life; and interconnectedness of productivity and quality of life. She holds a PhD in Organisational Studies, an MSc in Human Resource Management, and a BA in Psychology and Management. She is a member of The Productivity Institute and the Working Time Reduction Research Network. She is affiliated to Trinity College, Cambridge.

Tackling political disenchantment in 'forgotten about' places: what should governments try now?

SPEAKERS:

Andrés Rodríguez-Pose

Professor of Economic Geography, London School of Economics

Andrés Rodríguez-Pose is a Professor of Economic Geography at the London School of Economics, where he was Head of the Department of Geography and Environment between 2006 and 2009. He is a regular advisor to several Directorates of the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, the Cities Alliance, the OECD, the International Labour Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Development Bank of Latin America, among others. Andrés is a part-time Professor of Innovation at the University of Stavanger (Norway).

Jessica Studdert

Chief Executive, New Local

Jessica Studdert is New Local's Chief Executive, providing strategic oversight of the organisation. She writes and speaks about numerous subjects related to localism, devolution, public service reform and local finance. She co-authored the Community Paradigm with Adam Lent which was published in 2019 and continues to inform much of New Local's research and practice. She joined the organisation in September 2015. Previously, Jessica was political adviser to the Labour Group at the Local Government Association (LGA).

Have western governments got a handle on the root causes of the inequalities creating deep disenchantment and occasional citizen unrest in hinterland places and poorer communities? What kinds of policy tools and interventions are most likely to address these factors? What can be learned from central, regional and local government initiatives since the mid-2000s? Is devolution an important part of the answer? This panel will explore these issues, looking in-depth at the UK's recent experience and considering trends across western Europe. Do liberal democracies have the right kinds of policy tools and ambition to move the dial on geographically rooted inequalities?

Tom Walker

Executive Director Economy, Investment and Public Health, Essex County Council

Tom Walker is Executive Director Economy, Investment and Public Health, at Essex County Council. Before this, he worked in Whitehall, predominantly in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Tom has led national policy, delivered on environment, cities and regional policy, neighbourhood planning, and local government reform. He has also worked in the Cabinet Office leading the Levelling Up Task Force. Tom is the Chair of Abney Park Trust, a small voluntary run charity, in his home borough of Hackney.

CHAIR:

Michael Kenny

Professor of Public Policy, and Co-Director, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge

Professor Michael Kenny is the inaugural Director of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy. His research interests include public policy; governance and devolution; territorial politics; British politics and political ideas. He is currently involved in research projects exploring various issues relating to infrastructure policy. He is part of a research team funded by The Productivity Institute examining various institutional and governance questions. He is currently writing "The World Island", with Nick Pearce, which will examine the policy and ideological implications of shifting conceptions of the UK as a maritime state.

Psychological inoculation against misinformation

Much like a viral contagion, misinformation can spread rapidly from one mind to another. Inoculation theory offers a natural basis for developing a psychological 'vaccine' against the spread of fake news and misinformation. Specifically, I'll show that it is possible to pre-emptively "immunize" people against disinformation by pre-exposing them to severely weakened doses of the techniques that underlie its production. This process of 'prebunking' helps people cultivate cognitive antibodies in both simulated and real social media environments. I'll showcase several interventions we developed and evaluated—with public health authorities and social media companies—to help citizens around the world recognise and resist unwanted attempts to manipulate and mislead.

SPEAKER:

Sander van der Linden

Professor of Social Psychology in Society and Director of the Cambridge Social Decision-Making Lab, Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge

Sander van der Linden, PhD, is Professor of Social Psychology in Society, and Director of the Cambridge Social Decision-Making Lab in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cambridge. He has won numerous awards for his research on human judgment, communication, and decision-making, including the Rising Star Award from the Association for Psychological Science (APS). He is ranked among the top 1% of highly cited social scientists worldwide and has published over 175 research papers. He is the author of "Foolproof: Why We Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity" which was named a Financial Times and Nature Top Science Book of the Year.

CHAIR:

Diane Coyle

Bennett Professor of Public Policy and Co-Director of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge

See page 4 for bio.

The Bennett Institute is committed to interdisciplinary policy research into the major challenges facing the world, and to high-quality teaching and dissemination of the knowledge and skills required in public policy.

WITH THANKS TO:

Peter Bennett

Founding benefactor of the Peter Bennett Foundation

Peter Bennett is the founding benefactor of the Peter Bennett Foundation (2013), and the Bennett Institute for Public Policy (2018). Graduating in 1978, he read Economics at Churchill College. Following a successful career in banking and hedge fund management, Peter now devotes his time to pursuing philanthropic endeavours to promote equality and reduce poverty through direct donations and institutional support. The Peter Bennett Foundation also established the Bennett Institute for Applied Data Science at The University of Oxford (2021).

More recently, the Foundation has supported the new Whittle Laboratory (2022), with the establishment of The Bennett Innovation Laboratory, a radical multidisciplinary innovation centre that brings together world-leading experts to solve complex challenges, the Science Museum (2023) and the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex (2023).

RESEARCH PROJECT POSTERS

By addressing pressing policy challenges through rigorous research and analysis, the Bennett Institute 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 hospitality breaks.

Filip Mandys

Research Associate

Digitalisation and productivity: the Impact of ICTs on productivity in the transport sector

Productivity growth has been low in many major economies since the 2008 financial crisis. Our research examines whether greater digitalisation can lead to higher productivity growth in the transport sector – a sector that represents a key part of global supply chains, yet is one of the least digitalised.

Rosa Marks

Research Assistant

Social infrastructure in new towns

In July 2024, the UK Government announced its plans to deliver the 'next generation of new towns'. But the success of these new towns will require far more than just houses; it hinges on the provision of community facilities that foster interaction and connectivity among residents. This report explores what we can learn from the UK's post-war New Towns programme about the delivery and long-term maintenance of social infrastructure in new developments.

Measuring social and cultural infrastructure

Over the last few years, there has been increasing recognition in academic and policy circles of the importance of social and cultural infrastructure in the lives of communities. However, up until now, there has been no consistent way of measuring this phenomenon. Funded by the British Academy, this project provides a novel approach to defining and measuring social and cultural infrastructure.

John Lourenze Poquiz

Research Associate

Mapping the landscape of economics of AI research

This study conducts a systematic review of the economics of AI literature using topic modelling. It finds that AI adoption, manufacturing, and AI in HR dominate published research. It also finds some divergence between the topics from published works and AI working papers.

Burcu Sevde Selvi

Research Assistant

Exploring economic strengths and addressing productivity challenges in East Anglia

This research highlights a range of cross-cutting themes underpinning multiple dimensions of regional economic development and productivity in East Anglia, such as skills, sustainability, infrastructure, and governance. By identifying these regional disparities and interconnected issues, we aim to guide strategic efforts that promote inclusive growth and strengthen the region's long-term economic development.

Aleksei Turobov

Research Associate

Beyond AI zero-sum: domain specific pathways for international AI cooperation

The prevailing narrative frames international AI governance as a zero-sum competition where institutional fragmentation undermines effective coordination. Our research challenges this assumption with evidence that domain-specific approaches transform policy fragmentation into functional complementarity that enhances international cooperation.

Alex Walker

Research Assistant

The Council of the Nations and Regions, and UK intergovernmental relations

This project, in collaboration with PolicyWISE, examines the recently established Council of the Nations and Regions, looking at how the Council might be developed; where it fits within the wider architecture of UK intergovernmental relations; and how it can contribute to better relations between central government, the devolved governments, and the English 'metro' mayors.

Julia Wdowin

Research Associate

Measuring and estimating shadow prices

Comprehensive wealth accounting maintains that measuring stocks of different types of capitals is crucial to getting a better idea about the progress of an economy. Yet, many capital assets, especially belonging to the 'missing capitals' categories, have significant non-market features. This project works to develop methods for measuring the social welfare value of missing capital assets that do not have a market price, or whose market price does not reflect their broader social worth.

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