



INTERDISCIPLINARY ACADEMIC CONFERENCE 2026

Failure, Disaster and Near Misses

An Interdisciplinary Conversation

EVENT PROGRAMME

DATE

Friday 23rd October 2026

08:30 – 17:30 · Dinner 18:30 – 21:00

VENUE

Reading School

Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LW



WELCOME

Failure is inevitable. Failing to learn from it is not.

Welcome to Reading School's first Interdisciplinary Academic Conference. Today brings together alumni, academics and leading professionals from medicine and public health, engineering and technology, law, politics and public policy, and economics, finance and business to explore how failure, disaster and near misses shape innovation, safety, leadership, ethics and decision-making.

The morning is shared: an opening keynote, a cross-disciplinary panel and roundtable discussions in mixed groups. In the afternoon, you choose one of four subject lanes for a talk and breakout, before everyone reconvenes in Big School to compare findings.

"Every profession represented at this conference has learned, sometimes painfully, that its most valuable lessons come from the moments when things went wrong. What is rare is the chance to hear a hospital chief executive, an engineer, a senior civil servant and a test pilot explain how they make sense of failure, and to discover how much they have to teach one another."

I am delighted that so many Old Redingensians are returning to share that experience. Their careers show what a Reading School education can lead to, and their willingness to speak candidly about failure is exactly the kind of honest, curious thinking we hope to nurture in every pupil."

Rev Dr Chris Evans, Headmaster

Four disciplines, one conversation

Medicine & Public Health

Learning from patient safety incidents, diagnostic errors and healthcare near misses.

Engineering & Technology

Engineering disasters, predictive maintenance and fail-safe design.

Law, Politics & Public Policy

Regulatory risk, unexpected consequences and the ethics of decision-making.

Economics, Finance & Business

Financial near misses, risk management and algorithmic decision-making.

What to bring to the conference

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Notebook and pens | ☐ Any relevant reading materials or documents |
| ☐ Laptop or tablet | ☐ Business cards or contact details for networking |
| ☐ Phone and laptop chargers | ☐ Water bottle |
| ☐ Power bank | |

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide these items on the day, so please ensure you come prepared with everything you need to take notes and participate fully in the sessions.



THE DAY AT A GLANCE

Friday 23rd October 2026

CONFERENCE

08:30 – 09:20	Arrival Entrance via Erleigh Road or Craven Road Cloakroom: Room 10 Registration & breakfast: Refectory	● ROOM 10	● REFECTORY
09:30 – 09:45	Welcome & opening remarks	● BIG SCHOOL	
09:45 – 10:20	Opening keynote Dealing with Success and Failure	● BIG SCHOOL	
10:30 – 10:50	Coffee break	● REFECTORY	
11:00 – 12:00	Panel discussion When Things Go Wrong: Lessons from Failure Across Disciplines	● BIG SCHOOL	
12:00 – 13:00	Cross-industry roundtable discussions	● BIG SCHOOL	
13:00 – 14:00	Networking lunch	● REFECTORY	
14:10 – 15:00	Subject-specific talks Choose one of four parallel tracks	● ROOMS 1, 2, 3 & 6	
15:00 – 15:30	Subject-specific breakout sessions Same room as your talk	● ROOMS 1, 2, 3 & 6	
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee break	● REFECTORY	
16:10 – 16:45	Reconvening session Reporting back and synthesis	● BIG SCHOOL	
16:45 – 17:30	Closing reflections & next steps Personal experience of disaster	● BIG SCHOOL	
17:30 – 18:30	Networking & speed mentoring	● REFECTORY	● ROOMS 1, 2 & 3
OPTIONAL EVENING DINNER			
18:30 – 18:40	Headmaster's welcome address	● REFECTORY	
18:40 – 19:40	Dinner & live music performance	● REFECTORY	
19:40 – 20:00	Keynote speech: Dr Peter Coggan (OR 1961–1964)	● REFECTORY	
20:15 – 20:30	Closing remarks: the Headmaster	● REFECTORY	
20:30 – 21:00	Evening concludes	● REFECTORY	

MORNING SESSIONS

Keynote, panel and roundtables

09:45 – 10:20

● BIG SCHOOL

Opening keynote: Dealing with Success and Failure

Sir Philip Lowe (OR 1957–1964), former Director-General for Competition and for Energy at the European Commission

Why can success sow the seeds of failure? Sir Philip Lowe draws on his experience of European economic and competition policy to explore how organisations and individuals respond to setbacks, anticipate change and identify the early signs of failure. From industrial decline and the 2007–08 financial crisis to Brexit and competition policy, he considers why challenging complacency, scanning the horizon and learning from setbacks are essential to future success.

11:00 – 12:00

● BIG SCHOOL

Panel discussion

When Things Go Wrong: Lessons from Failure Across Disciplines

Chaired by Duncan Cook (OR 2000–2007), with Professor Neil Mansfield (OR 1982–1989), Professor Ben Cowling MBE (OR 1990–1997) and Philip Davies (OR 1967–1974)

12:00 – 13:00

● BIG SCHOOL

Cross-industry roundtable discussions

Led by Dr Carl Cater (OR 1986–1993), with facilitators Dominic Eldred-Earl (OR 1987–1992) and the Headmaster, Rev Dr Chris Evans (OR 1990–1997)

Mixed groups from different industries answer:

1. *What are the common causes of failure across the different sectors and industries represented around the table?*
2. *How does your sector respond to near misses, and what methods or tools could you borrow from another field?*
3. *What cultural and structural barriers prevent learning from failure?*

AFTERNOON SESSIONS

Subject-specific talks and breakouts

Four tracks run in parallel from 14:10. Choose one subject lane: a 50-minute talk with Q&A followed by a 30-minute breakout in the same room. Breakouts pick up themes from the talk and expand them into key questions, drawing on your own experience.

MEDICINE & PUBLIC HEALTH

● ROOM 1

TALK · 14:10 – 15:00

Near Misses in Patient Safety: What Hospitals Can Learn from Each Other

Raghuv Bhasin (OR 1998–2003)

BREAKOUT · 15:00 – 15:30

Are we safe? Near misses in resuscitation and end of life care

Led by Dr Dev Gakhar (OR 2010–2017)

ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY

● ROOM 2

TALK · 14:10 – 15:00

Engineering Disasters and the Role of Predictive Maintenance

David Pocock (OR 1971–1978)

BREAKOUT · 15:00 – 15:30

Predictive engineering: from near misses to fail-safe design

Led by Andrew Allen (OR 1990–1997)

LAW, POLITICS & PUBLIC POLICY

● ROOM 3

TALK · 14:10 – 15:00

Why public policy and implementation practice struggles to address unexpected risks

Jonathan Nancekivell-Smith CBE (OR 1985–1992)

BREAKOUT · 15:00 – 15:30

Regulatory near misses and the ethics of decision-making

Led by Duncan Cook (OR 2000–2007)

ECONOMICS, FINANCE & BUSINESS

● ROOM 6

TALK · 14:10 – 15:00

Financial Near Misses: Risk Management in Uncertain Times

Neale Jouques OBE (OR 1978–1985)

BREAKOUT · 15:00 – 15:30

Managing risk and making decisions under uncertainty

Led by Richard Taylor (OR 1988–1995)

15:30 – 16:00

Coffee break

● REFECTORY

16:10 – 16:45

Reconvening session

Reporting back and synthesis

Hosted by the Headmaster, Rev Dr Chris Evans

● BIG SCHOOL

16:45 – 17:30

Closing reflections & next steps

Personal experience of disaster

Alex Warner (OR 1992–1997), Experimental Test Pilot and Senior T&E Leader

● BIG SCHOOL

17:30 – 18:30

Networking & speed mentoring

● REFECTORY

● ROOMS 1, 2 & 3



OPTIONAL EVENING DINNER · 18:30 – 21:00

Dinner, live music and a keynote from Dr Peter Coggan

The day closes in the Refectory with the Headmaster's welcome address, followed by dinner, live music and an evening keynote from Dr Peter Coggan (OR 1961–1964), retired Professor of Family Medicine and Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education at Michigan State University.

18:30 – 18:40 Headmaster's welcome address

● REFECTORY

18:40 – 19:40 Dinner & live music performance

● REFECTORY

19:40 – 20:00 Keynote speech: Dr Peter Coggan (OR 1961–1964)

● REFECTORY

20:15 – 20:30 Closing remarks: the Headmaster

● REFECTORY

20:30 – 21:00 Evening concludes

● REFECTORY

WHERE TO FIND THINGS

Rooms and spaces

Big School	Welcome, opening keynote, panel, roundtables, reconvening, and closing reflections
Refectory	Registration and breakfast, coffee breaks, lunch, networking and speed mentoring, and the whole evening: welcome address, dinner, live music, keynote and closing remarks
Rooms 1, 2, 3 & 6	Subject-specific talks and breakouts (Room 1 Medicine & Public Health · Room 2 Engineering & Technology · Room 3 Law, Politics & Public Policy · Room 6 Economics, Finance & Business); Rooms 1–3 also host speed mentoring
Room 10	Cloakroom (entrance via Erleigh Road or Craven Road)
Silent Study Space, the Quad	Quiet working space during breaks
Lost property	Report to the registration desk or a member of staff
Toilets	Speakers and guests: Refectory toilets, including one with disabled access Students: drama studios



SPEAKERS, HOSTS AND FACILITATORS

Seventeen Old Redingensians



WELCOME, ROUNDTABLES & RECONVENING · BIG SCHOOL

Rev Dr Chris Evans

OR 1990–1997

Headmaster, Reading School

Headmaster of Reading School and himself an Old Redingensian. He opens the day, joins the cross-industry roundtables as a facilitator and hosts the reconvening session.



OPENING KEYNOTE · 09:45 · BIG SCHOOL

Sir Philip Lowe

OR 1957–1964

Former Director-General for Competition and for Energy, European Commission; Strategic Advisor, Oxera

Joined the European Commission in 1973 and went on to lead its Directorates-General for Development, Competition and Energy. Oversaw the Commission's merger, antitrust and state aid work, including the Microsoft and Intel decisions, and later served as a non-executive director of the UK Competition and Markets Authority.



PANEL CHAIR · 11:00 · BIG SCHOOL · BREAKOUT LEAD · 15:00 · ROOM 3

Duncan Cook

OR 2000–2007

Former Senior Civil Servant & PhD Researcher

Economist and statistician. Worked with the South Sudanese government as an Overseas Development Institute Fellow and as a World Bank consultant. Experience in the UK government across local government finance, the Cabinet Office, and as a Senior Civil Servant producing COVID analysis at the Office for National Statistics. Now completing a PhD in evidence use in UK place-based policy and consulting for the World Bank Poverty and Equity team.



PANELLIST · 11:00 · BIG SCHOOL

Professor Neil Mansfield

OR 1982–1989

Executive Dean for Research and International, Nottingham Trent University; Professor of Human Factors Engineering

Researches how to design safer, more comfortable environments for people, from aircraft to high-speed boats, and has published over 100 papers, patents and books. A former President of the Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors.



PANELLIST · 11:00 · BIG SCHOOL

Professor Ben Cowling MBE

OR 1990–1997

Chair Professor of Epidemiology; Head of the Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, University of Hong Kong

Has worked at the University of Hong Kong since 2004. His research focuses on influenza and other respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, with particular interest in vaccination strategies and population immunity.

SPEAKERS, HOSTS AND FACILITATORS · CONTINUED



PANELLIST · 11:00 · BIG SCHOOL

Philip Davies

OR 1967–1974

Global Health Executive & Policy Advisor

A career in health systems across four countries, including Deputy Director-General of the New Zealand Ministry of Health, Deputy Secretary of the Australian Department of Health and Ageing, Permanent Secretary for Health in Fiji and Deputy Chair of the WHO Executive Board.



ROUNDTABLE FACILITATOR · 12:00 · BIG SCHOOL

Dominic Eldred-Earl

OR 1987–1992

Author, Publisher & Senior Speaker Consultant

An author, publisher and senior speaker consultant, facilitating the cross-industry roundtable discussions.



ROUNDTABLE LEAD · 12:00 · BIG SCHOOL

Dr Carl Cater

OR 1986–1993

Associate Professor in Tourism, Swansea University; Visiting Professor, University of the Highlands and Islands

A specialist in adventure tourism, ecotourism and risk management who has worked in more than 80 countries. Author of over fifty papers, co-editor of the International Handbook of Adventure Tourism and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.



MEDICINE & PUBLIC HEALTH TALK · 14:10 · ROOM 1

Raghuv Bhasin

OR 1998–2003

Chief Executive, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust

Chief Executive of Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust since 2025. Previously Principal Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Health, he was seconded during the pandemic to help set up and lead NHS Test and Trace as Chief of Staff.

SPEAKERS, HOSTS AND FACILITATORS · CONTINUED



ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY TALK · 14:10 · ROOM 2

David Pocock

OR 1971–1978

Civil Engineer; former Senior Director of Asset Management, Jacobs; Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers

A career civil engineer of over 40 years with Taylor Woodrow and Halcrow, now Jacobs, specialising in the durability, failure investigation and lifecycle management of infrastructure, from bridges and docks to utilities.



LAW, POLITICS & PUBLIC POLICY TALK · 14:10 · ROOM 3

Jonathan Nancekivell-Smith CBE

OR 1985–1992

Chief Operating Officer in the Civil Service; former Head of the No.10 Delivery Unit

A Senior Civil Servant since 2004 whose roles include Principal Private Secretary to the Home Secretary, Head of the No.10 Delivery Unit and Gold Commander for Operation London Bridge. Awarded a CBE in 2024.



ECONOMICS, FINANCE & BUSINESS TALK · 14:10 · ROOM 6

Neale Jouques OBE

OR 1978–1985

Chief Operating Officer, Altura

Over twenty years in the British Army leading logistics and operations in the Balkans, the Middle East and Afghanistan, then senior roles at London Stansted Airport. Co-founded Versilia Solutions and now helps airlines improve performance as a founder of Altura.



MEDICINE & PUBLIC HEALTH BREAKOUT · 15:00 · ROOM 1

Dr Dev Gakhar

OR 2010–2017

Doctor, Content Creator, Founder of Doctor Devify, Co-founder of the Healthcare Creators Collective

Dev Gakhar is an NHS internal medicine resident doctor and the founder of Doctor Devify, a platform built to help NHS professionals and students navigate their careers and beyond. He is also a co-founder of the Healthcare Creators Collective, which is building the home for healthcare content creators in the UK and setting a standard for content creation. His work has taken him from the wards to the face of national campaigns, to 10 Downing Street and more.

SPEAKERS, HOSTS AND FACILITATORS · CONTINUED



ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY BREAKOUT · 15:00 · ROOM 2

Andrew Allen

OR 1990–1997

Head of Risk Management, HS2 Ltd; Certified Fellow of the Institute of Risk Management

Has spent over 25 years advising on major capital programmes in the UK and overseas. Particularly interested in how failures emerge from seemingly robust circumstances, and how our response can be the difference between disaster and discovery.



ECONOMICS, FINANCE & BUSINESS BREAKOUT · 15:00 · ROOM 6

Richard Taylor

OR 1988–1995

Commercial leader with board-level and executive committee experience

Richard Taylor is an experienced commercial leader with board-level and executive committee experience. He brings a strategic perspective on business leadership, decision-making and managing risk in complex environments. At the conference, Richard will help delegates explore how organisations respond to uncertainty, learn from setbacks and make better decisions to reduce the risk of failure.



CLOSING REFLECTIONS · 16:45 · BIG SCHOOL

Alex Warner

OR 1992–1997

Experimental Test Pilot; Senior Test & Evaluation Leader; Helicopter Flight Instructor

An Army officer, Apache pilot and Experimental Test Pilot who most recently commanded the Rotary Wing Test and Evaluation Squadron at Boscombe Down, bringing two decades of experience of safety, risk and learning from near misses.



EVENING KEYNOTE · 19:40 · REFECTORY

Dr Peter Coggan

OR 1961–1964

Professor of Family Medicine; Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education, Michigan State University (retired)

A British-trained physician who built a career in US academic medicine, with leadership roles at the University of Washington, UC Irvine, Henry Ford Health System and Michigan State University, and co-authored a report to the US Congress on medical education.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

During your visit

**VISITOR
WI-FI****NETWORK (SSID)
RS-BYOD****USERNAME
visitor****PASSWORD
david9**

Photography & filming

By attending this event, you consent to the capture of photography and videography for the purpose of marketing and historical archiving by Reading School. These images and recordings may be used in printed materials (e.g. the school prospectus), on the school website, and on official school social media channels.

Reading School processes personal data in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR). Your data will be handled securely and will not be used for commercial purposes.

Cloakroom & lost property

The cloakroom is in Room 10. If you find any lost property or have lost an item during your visit, please report to a member of staff.

Work spaces

You may use the Silent Study Space in the Quad to work quietly, answer calls or emails during the breaks of the conference.

Emergencies

In case of fire, or if event staff ask you to evacuate, please leave via the nearest exit and stay at the furthest point from the school, away from buildings or structures. The closest assembly point is the School field.

Smoking

Smoking is prohibited on site. Those who wish to smoke must do so off site.

Dress code

Smart-casual.
Students: school uniform and lanyards.

Event enquiries

For any questions about event logistics, please contact Miss Hutchinson at phutchinson@reading-school.co.uk.



Thank you for joining us

Find out more about the conference online at pages.reading-school.co.uk/conference. Stay in touch and join [the Redingensians website](#), or email us at alumni@reading-school.co.uk.