



Great Debate 2026

Universities, Professional Training and Apprenticeships: The Future Path to Success

Wednesday 11 March 2026

Join us for an unmissable debate that tackles one of the most pressing questions in education and career development: *What are the best pathways to success in a rapidly changing world?* As technology advances and industries evolve, the traditional routes to professional achievement are being challenged.

Universities have long been seen as the gateway to opportunity, but vocational training and apprenticeships are gaining recognition as equally prestigious and practical alternatives. This event brings together thoughts from leaders from higher education, further education, industry, and professional bodies to explore how these pathways can coexist and complement each other.

Hear from:

- **The Power of Apprenticeships and Vocational Routes: Equitable Pathways for a Talent Pipeline**
Jennie Thomson, Head Teacher, UTC Reading
- **The Evolving Role of Universities in a Diverse and Dynamic Education and Skills Ecosystem**
Dr Donya Hajialiazadeh, Associate Professor, Department of Bridge/Structural Engineering, University of Surrey
- **Skills for the Future: What Employers Really Need from Graduates and Apprentices**
Dr Martin Thomas, Head of Innovative Engineering Talent, AWE
- **Professional Standards and Lifelong Learning: Building Bridges Between Education and Practice**
Ian Stewart, Head of Regional Engagement, Institution of Chemical Engineers
Annette Allmark, Executive Director for Awarding and Assessment, British Computer Society

Expect lively discussion, diverse perspectives, and actionable ideas to help shape the next generation of professionals. Whether you are an educator, employer, student, or policymaker, this debate will provide clarity and inspiration on how to navigate the evolving landscape of learning and work.

Time: 18:15–21:00 (tea and coffee from 18:15)

Location: The Henley Business School, The University Of Reading, Whiteknights Campus, Reading RG6 6UR

Cost: Free of charge, open to all

Register at: <https://forms.office.com/e/jRPC8RqFfV>

