



THE WADHAM EXPERIENCE

2026



‘This is a programme designed for already successful and experienced individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds to develop new ways of thinking in a conceptually ambitious way that will fundamentally recast their future impact and re-invigorate their role.

‘We want to challenge our participants, to invite them to question their own previously held beliefs with new ways of thinking critically, underpinned by history, philosophy and the arts. Multi-disciplinary approaches are applicable to all challenges: from why people buy or do certain things to social health concerns; from ideas about creative or innovative processes to global macroeconomics.’

Jane Garnett, Fellow and Tutor in History

A Space to Think

A TRANSFORMATIVE INTELLECTUAL RETREAT FOR SENIOR LEADERS OF CHANGE

The challenges we currently face demand new outlooks and ideas. Now is the time to bring critical thinking and broader perspectives into the world and the workplace. A personal renaissance for senior leaders from a range of sectors, this is a programme to think, reflect, and for each participant to come up with one insight which could change their future and that of many other people.

Our innovative approach to these challenges brings together a select group of highly experienced professionals from across the globe with our college fellows to work on an academic and cultural programme that provokes and inspires new approaches to persistent issues and stimulates new ideas and endeavours.

An intense immersion in the collegiate tutorial environment, the programme taps into the same energy that you would expect from an Oxford college: working on the principles of debate and enquiry in a stimulating, multigenerational community.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO THINK DIFFERENTLY

- How much more could you effect change if your horizons of understanding were broader, and your perspective longer? Learn why interdisciplinary thought is crucial for senior leaders of today and tomorrow
- In your field of influence what use could you make of improved critical thinking from across disciplines, and from the greatest thinkers past and present?
- When did you last question how you think about your work, your industry, and your impact on it?

AT A GLANCE

- Two programmes, both ‘intellectual retreats’, but with different themes, on 6-11 September and 13-18 September 2026
- Each, 5-days and fully residential at the University of Oxford. Reside and learn within historic Wadham College, and explore wider university treasures
- For senior leaders, entrepreneurs and adventurers, working globally and from diverse sectors including the arts, business, law, and healthcare
- Hands-on engagement with the humanities to develop core leadership capabilities
- An emphasis on how to think critically and creatively (rather than what to think)
- Meals, accommodation and course materials are included in the programme fee

HOW DO WE THINK ABOUT THE WORLD?

'This programme is an invitation to think and to rethink in ways that loosen preconceptions and open up new avenues. It's about breathing new intellectual and practical life into areas of thought that have become habitual—we want people to reach novel conclusions on their own, to be open to new analyses and approaches, to be willing to be wrong. This intense week of openness and connection and discovery offers the prospect of new perspectives and new ideas in your career and practice. And because thought and action are bound up with each other, the thinking you do about your next projects or challenges may take them in a completely new direction.'

TOM SINCLAIR, TUTORIAL FELLOW IN PHILOSOPHY

The unique vitality of the collegiate system in Oxford is built on energising conversations between people from different backgrounds who are studying in a variety of fields. The Humanities have played a crucial role in fostering and focusing these interconnections. The historical, philosophical and aesthetic enquiry of the Wadham Experience provides a distinctive intellectual core within which participants work collaboratively as well as exploring their own personal interests. They breathe new life into existing challenges, and inspire new ones.

BENEFITS TO YOU:

- Significantly develop the way you think about your work and practice, to invigorate and boost your personal capacity and potential
- Step away from your current assumptions about confronting challenges and meeting goals, and return with entirely new approaches to them
- Give yourself the opportunity to think more flexibly, with more curiosity and clarity, to rejuvenate your impact
- Revive your creativity and interest in the world around you to inspire new ideas and innovation
- Become part of an intellectually curious, diverse and supportive network, drawn from a range of sectors and world regions.

BENEFITS TO YOUR ORGANISATION:

- Organisations all require new ideas for growth and change - bring the creativity and innovation from a breadth of fields and thinking into yours
- Gain a competitive edge by developing your organisation into one that can access ideas from outside its normal field of vision or sector
- Be able to guide and advise colleagues to help with thoughtful decision-making and idea creation.





The Programme

In each of these two courses you will explore ideas and forge deeper understandings in conversation with specialist academics and peers from across the disciplines. In addition, you will participate in creative events, and enjoy privileged access to unique niches in Oxford's rich cultural ecosystem. Meanwhile, to ensure that there is nourishment for body and spirit as well as the mind, there will be dinners in spectacular settings, punting on the Cherwell, croquet in the garden, opportunities for meditation and exercise, and much more besides.

EACH DAY WILL INCLUDE:

WHY THE AGE OF AI NEEDS THE HUMANITIES

- Optional guided meditation or physical exercise such as yoga
- Seminar with a leading Oxford academic, on a key programme theme
- Hands-on engagement with the humanities (history, literature, architecture, music, art, ethics)
- Fireside chat or panel discussion with inspiring academics and industry professionals
- An Oxford Tutorial (on the final day)
- Debate and reflection with peers and faculty, including over breakfast and lunch in the 400-year old Wadham Hall
- Drinks receptions and fine-dining in historic and thought-provoking settings, and a farewell banquet on the final day

As AI and automation advance, honing 'human' skills will give leaders a valuable advantage; immersion in the humanities, via the *Wadham Experience*, can optimise those important leadership skills, increasing critical thinking, adaptability, listening, creativity and innovation. For some participants - those at a crossroads or seeking a mini-sabbatical - immersion in the humanities will nourish intellectual curiosity, spark renewed energy and direction.



Thinking Clearly: 6-11 September 2026

ATTENTION IN A CACOPHONOUS WORLD

Day 1: Attention and Distraction: A Historical Perspective

With Carolin Duttlinger

Day 2: Music and Psychology: Ways of Listening

With Eric Clarke

Day 3: Philosophy: The Ethics of Attention

With Tom Sinclair

Day 4: Tutorial sessions

Thinking Critically: 13-18 September 2026

CIVILISATION ON THE EDGE

Day 1: The Myths We Live By: History, Memory and Tradition

With George Southcombe

Day 2: Ancient & Modern: Democracy and Demagoguery

With Peter Thonemann

Day 3: Philosophy: Democracy and Discontent

With Tom Sinclair

Day 4: Tutorial sessions

'We have had world-class lecturers from Wadham and Oxford and I have had things presented to me in a way that I really hadn't thought about before. The final tutorial pulled together the strands of the week and allowed me to talk about the projects I am doing externally, and I have had valuable advice about how I can move that forward which gives it a much longer-term impact from this experience.'

**Ben Gordon, 2024 Participant
Trustee, United Learning**



'It's a capsule of the Wadham and Oxford experience for people who haven't had it before, and a reinvigoration for those that have. Wadham has prided itself on encouraging serious holistic thinking – on being a place of questioning and experimentation across disciplines.'

GEORGE SOUTHCOMBE, FELLOW BY SPECIAL ELECTION IN HISTORY

'Wadham has a unique position and its reputation for being at the very centre of important questions, and thinking. That tradition that is very deep in Wadham makes it a unique place to use the humanities and apply them to your business life. The uniqueness of the Wadham Experience and its ability to convey this brings to all participants a way of thinking that is 'uniquely Wadham'.'

**Leigh Hopkins, 2024 participant
Board Member, FinTech & Retail**

Why Wadham?

BRINGING WADHAM TO THE WORLD. THE PERFECT HOST FOR THIS INTERDISCIPLINARY AND INNOVATIVE VENTURE

INTELLECTUAL DEBATE FOR TROUBLED TIMES

John Wilkins, the Warden in the mid-17th century – a period of intense ideological conflict and civil war – wanted the college to be 'a haven of peace and intellectual curiosity in the midst of troubled times'.

A polymath who conceived of travel to the moon as well as inventing a universal language, he conducted experiments in the college gardens and gathered around him a dynamic, creative group of thinkers who formed the nucleus of the Royal Society.

Samuel Barnett and his wife founded Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel to spearhead a new form of inter-class social engagement and understanding

- They also founded the Whitechapel Gallery – the first purpose-built art gallery in the UK – to foster the role of art in enhancing the quality of life and human dignity
- Barnett's ideal of social reciprocity 'to learn as much as to teach; to receive as much as to give' – encapsulates the principles which underpin intellectual and personal interchange within the college.

COMMUNITY WITHOUT CONFORMITY

This was the aspiration for the college of Joseph Wells, Wadham's Warden during another world-challenging and world-changing historical moment – the First World War.

AN IMMERSIVE, EDUCATIONAL RETREAT

The beautiful buildings and gardens at Wadham remain a haven of peace and intellectual curiosity in troubled times.

In this intense week at Wadham we offer an educational pilgrimage. A space for thought which has nurtured innovative thinking over more than four centuries. A chance to stand back and rethink work and the world around. It will leave you feeling emotionally, physically and intellectually stimulated and recharged.

Whether you are returning to Oxford having studied here before, or are coming for the first time, this programme offers a new and exciting opportunity and a transformative experience.

WORLD - CHANGING

Today, Wadham's reputation is as a progressive and outward-looking college:

- This was prefigured in the 19th and early 20th centuries when Wadham was known for its radicalism
- In 1884 the Wadham History graduate

Faculty

At the heart of your Wadham Experience is a distinguished team of academics and inspiring industry practitioners from the University of Oxford and beyond. Centred in Wadham and convening the best of Oxford, this creates a rich intellectual and experiential environment, where you will debate, reflect, be challenged and inspired.

You, your faculty and fellow participants will be united by a shared belief in the power of intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. Discussions may continue outside of formal seminars and the Tutorial, through walks in the grounds, over drinks, through dinner.

Below is a list of typical Wadham Experience programme faculty.



Eric Clarke, Fellow, Heather Professor of Music

Professor Clarke's work is in the psychology of music, music theory, and musical aesthetics/semiotics. He is particularly interested in expression in performance, the perception and production of rhythm, musical meaning, the relationships between music and language, the analysis of pop music, the history and aesthetics of recorded music, and music and the body.



Carolin Duttlinger, Ockenden Fellow in German

Professor Duttlinger's research interests are in modern German literature, thought and visual culture, with a particular focus on modernist and contemporary literature. She has worked on such areas as Weimar photography, the history and theory of perception, literature, memory and trauma, and on literature and anthropology.



Jane Garnett, Fellow and Tutor in Modern History

Dr Garnett's research is on intellectual, cultural and religious history, predominantly since the nineteenth century, including the study of gender and visual culture over wider periods. The common thread has been a concern with the historical understanding of beliefs and values.



Robert Hannigan CMG, Warden

Robert Hannigan joined Wadham College as Warden in 2021. He is a cyber security specialist who spent much of his career in government service. He was Director, GCHQ, the UK's largest intelligence and cyber agency, and established the National Cyber Security Centre.



Tehila Sasson, Associate Professor and Tutorial Fellow in History

Professor Sasson's research and teaching focuses on the British empire and the international order from 1850 until the present. She studies the social structures of inequalities, particularly their gendered and racial articulations, the history of economic thoughts, and the legal architecture of the economy.



Tom Sinclair, Tutorial Fellow in Philosophy

Professor Sinclair writes on political philosophy and ethics. In political philosophy, Tom is particularly interested in questions about the authority of political rule, the nature of justice and injustice, and the relation between political authority and justice.



George Southcombe, Fellow by Special Election in History

Dr Southcombe's research focuses on two broad, overlapping areas: the history of seventeenth-century dissent, and the relationship between early modern literature and history.



Chris Summerfield, Fellow, Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience

Professor Summerfield is Fellow by special election and principal investigator at the Summerfield lab which conducts research into how humans make decisions. His work lies at the intersection of cognitive science, neuroscience, AI research, and social science.



Peter Thonemann, FBA, Tutorial Fellow and Professor of Ancient History

Professor Thonemann teaches and supervises students across a broad range of Greek and Roman historical topics, with a particular focus on the Greek-speaking world from the archaic period to Late Antiquity, as well as Achaemenid Persia.



Erica Whyman OBE, Former Acting Artistic Director, Royal Shakespeare Company

Erica is an artistic leader, theatre director, facilitator, consultant and coach. She led various British theatre companies for 25 years, joining the Royal Shakespeare Company as Deputy Artistic Director in 2013 and most recently serving as Acting Artistic Director 2021-2023. Erica led the team which reopened The Other Place in March 2016, a creative hub dedicated to daring theatrical exploration.



'The group has been key, it's crucial. We are having debates in a diverse group of people but we are learning to disagree agreeably. We need to be able to have these robust discussions from different viewpoints and tolerate each other's views also. It has been wonderful to have the diverse people, backgrounds, professions, places in the world, ages... and for me I have felt a deep sense of connection that I feel I have been looking for for quite a long time.'

Dr Sam Akbar, 2024 Participant
Clinical Psychologist

Join us

Are you a successful leader, ambitious entrepreneur or curious adventurer? Are you up for an intellectual challenge?

NEXT PROGRAMME DATES

6-11 September: Thinking Clearly: Attention in a Cacophonous World

Or

13-18 September: Thinking Critically: Civilisation on the Edge

The cost for the programme (including fees, accommodation at Wadham, meals and course materials) is **£9,800** (VAT exempt).

Wadham is a charity and the proceeds will help provide long-term security for the College's core mission in teaching and research, including an expansion of our outreach programmes, seeking to widen access to Higher Education and Oxford.

Apply via our website or contact us with any queries.

W <https://we.wadham.ox.ac.uk/>

E we@wadham.ox.ac.uk

T +44 1865 277 970

CONTACT DETAILS

W <https://we.wadham.ox.ac.uk/>

E we@wadham.ox.ac.uk

T +44 1865 277 970

Wadham College
Parks Road
Oxford
OX1 3PN
UK

Please note that all information in this brochure is subject to change.