

## Centre for Social Futures

Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences  
Lancaster University, UK

### New Late Summer School Series 2026-2028

Lancaster, 22-26 September 2026

The Centre for Social Futures, Lancaster University, UK, is delighted to announce the launch of an exciting new series of late summer schools dedicated to explore and define why, how and in which ways key values might inform Futures thinking and practice.

**Theme:** Our starting theme for the first school in the series is Empathy, which feels apt given the turmoil, myths and realities of the world in 2026.

Empathy is often overlooked when listing the values which we think are essential to engage with futures thinking and practice. Despite the growing body of work deploying creative affective methods and techniques to engage with futures research, little attention has been paid to whether and how might our empathy for others be included in established techniques such as speculative thinking, forecasting, foresight, scenario planning, horizon scanning, and many more.

Empathy is a key component of what makes us human. It enables us to contemplate what it takes for individuals, families and societies to cope with the multiple effects of war; to experience the effects of the environmental crises first hand; to be treated differently because of gender, race, class, age, religious affiliation, the accent when speaking a second or third language or showing attachment to cultural roots; in short, to consider experiences which at first may seem removed or too different from our own. Crucially, this includes our connection to and distance from future generations, including the relationships that these generations will create for themselves and for the environments supporting their future.

Imagining and taking action to make better social futures is a collective endeavour where difference and context are key. Yet, we struggle to capture empathy, its multifarious shapes and forms, in the schemata of the futures we deem possible, probable and preferable. Critiques of empathy recognise the ability to relate to, feel and place ourselves in the circumstances experienced by others, and question the commensurability of responses without an intent or desire to remove the barriers shaping those circumstances, or, indeed, opening the possibility of 'doing bad things' (Breithaupt 2018). This, critics claim, is the realm of compassion.

Resonating with recent work by Rifkin (2010), Segal (2018), Lambert, Selin and Chermack (2024), among others, this late summer school will foreground the relationship between empathy and social futures to challenge our implicit assumptions of the futures we wish to be part of. It will also diversify the range of voices we normally consider in ways that help us assess the biases of, for example, generative AI, the failings of policy instruments, the insufficiency of frameworks that lack an understanding of important differences often relating to questions of culture and place. These biases and failings are an important point of critique when we consider the futures which they enable and constrain.

**Application and selection process:** The school invites graduates and professionals to think with us and act upon the need to identify and incorporate empathy into how we engage with futures. It draws on the expertise of scholars and practitioners based in Lancaster University whose work ranges across and connects the humanities, arts, and social sciences. Join us for a unique learning experience combining academic rigour with interactive workshops, networking opportunities, social activities, and, weather permitting (it is the Northwest of England after all!), excursions to Morecambe Bay and the Lake District.

Applications to the summer school should consist of:

- a short statement (no more than 1 A4) outlining their interest in the theme of empathy and social futures, how it relates to their work (PhD and otherwise), and what their contribution to the school might be; and
- a short CV no longer than 2 A4s.

Applications should be sent to [csf@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:csf@lancaster.ac.uk) with the subject heading 'Late Summer School 2026' no later than 12 June 2026.

We will limit the number of places to 30 participants. We expect registration fees to be in the range of £140-£200 to cover catering and running costs. All participants should meet their own travel and accommodation costs.

**Date and venue:** The late summer school will take place on **22-26 September 2026** in the Bailrigg campus of Lancaster University in the UK. Further details on the university and campus are available here: <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/about-us/our-campus/>