

Press Release – 15 January 2026



Launched in 2016, the Night of Ideas has become a worldwide project staged in 190 cities and 104 countries. In London and Edinburgh, the French Institute convenes **free debates and performances** to challenge our understanding of the world.

This year's edition will be launched by **Hélène Duchêne**, French Ambassador to the UK on **5 February 2026 at the French Institute in London**.

The opening event, placed under the umbrella of dance, will feature an improvisation with pianist **Karol Beffa** and ballerina and former Danseuse Etoile of the Paris Opera Ballet **Alice Renavand**. She will then be joined on stage by **Benoit Swan Pouffer**, Artistic Director of Rambert contemporary dance company. Together they will explore how dance can inspire us and move the world forward.

Crossing French and British perspectives, the Night of Ideas champions the free circulation of ideas to help apprehend the trends transforming our societies. Through a series of free and lively debates, leading guest speakers from both sides of the Channel will address **key issues of our times**.

They will engage the audience to tackle topics such as **global imbalances, geopolitical upheavals, the growing polarisation among Gen Z, AI in education, ending life ethically and shifting masculinities**.

The Night of Ideas is organised by the French Institute in London, in collaboration with the French Embassy to the United Kingdom, and the Embassy's Higher Education, Research and Innovation Department. It is supported by the French Institute's Trust and Patrons' Circle and Eurostar.

Night of Ideas – 5 February 2026
Free entrance (donations are welcomed)
Registration, programme & biographies on: www.institut-francais.org.uk/night-of-ideas
Venue: French Institute, 17 Queensberry Place, London SW7 2DT

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NIGHT OF IDEAS PROGRAMME
5 FEBRUARY 2026
AT THE FRENCH INSTITUTE IN LONDON

Opening

18.0 – 19.20

- HE **Hélène Duchêne**, French Ambassador to the UK, will launch the Night of Ideas 2026
- Welcome by **Anissia Morel**, Director of the Institut français du Royaume-Uni
- Dance performance by **Alice Renavand**, ballerina and former Danseuse Étoile of the Paris Opera Ballet with piano improvisation by **Karol Beffa**
- Opening address by **Benoit Swan Pouffer**, Artistic Director of Rambert, the London-based contemporary dance company

Alice Renavand and **Benoit Swan Pouffer** in conversation, chaired by **Sanjoy Roy**

The Baltic Frontline

19.40 – 20.50

European countries can no longer avoid addressing the challenges posed by Russia's recent choices and the long-term pressure they create for Europe's security and politics. From a Baltic and Northern European perspective, these threats are particularly acute: these States are Europe's strategic frontline and serve as laboratories for innovation in defence, democratic resilience and the fight against disinformation, offering important pointers for the future shape of Europe's security architecture.

With

- **Ian Bond** - Deputy Director of the Centre for European Reform
- **Oliver Moody** - Berlin bureau chief for The Times
- **Marie Mendras** - Professor at the Paris School of International Affairs - Sciences Po, author of *La Guerre permanente. L'ultime stratégie du Kremlin*
- **Maria Shagina** - Diamond-Brown Senior Research Fellow for Economic Sanctions, Standards and Strategy at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)
- **Elena Volochine** – France 24 senior reporter

Chaired by Luc Raynal - Defence Attaché at the French Embassy to the UK

Ethics, Law and Care at the End of Life

19.40 – 20.50

Set against ongoing UK debates on the Terminally Ill Adults Bill and proposed legislation on assisted dying and palliative care in France, this panel will explore the legal, medical and social questions surrounding the end of life. It will clarify the tensions between individual freedom, medical responsibility and collective solidarity, forming part of the current, broader reflection on what it means to “die with dignity” and how societies frame or limit the freedom to choose one’s own death.

With

- **Alexandra Mullock** – Senior Lecturer in Medical Law at the University of Manchester
- **Dr Annabel Price** - Associate Specialty Director in Palliative Care, University of Cambridge
- **Bernard Stirn** - Honorary Section President at the Conseil d’État, Permanent Secretary of the Académie des sciences morales et politiques

Chaired by Soazick Kerneis - Professor of legal history at the University of Paris-Nanterre and Research Fellow at the Maison française d’Oxford

Contemporary Masculinities

19.40 – 20.50

Representations of masculinity have become central to a wider cultural battle, with an imagined return to patriarchal order taking shape across digital and political spaces. In response to this rhetoric of lost virility, artists, researchers, and activists are reclaiming masculinities to explore their plurality, contradictions, and vulnerabilities. Between fragility and dominance, tenderness and performance, masculinity offers a lens through which to read our times. From couples to parenthood, masculinities are being redefined in the intimacy of daily life. What do these reconfigurations of the masculine reveal about how we live together?

With

- **Daisy Letourneur** - Writer, feminist, trans and lesbian activist
- **Ben Mechen** - Social and cultural historian of modern Britain at UCL
- **Alona Pardo** - Director at the Arts Council Collection, London

Chaired by Bradley Stephens - Academic Director for Programmes in the Faculty of Arts, Law, and Social Sciences at the University of Bristol

Global Imbalances: Is It Still Time to (Re)Act?

21.10 – 22.20

Persistent global macroeconomic imbalances pose serious risks to the global economy. They fuel trade, financial and geo-economic tensions, they increase the risk of geopolitical fragmentation, and they hinder the ability to find solutions for common challenges such as climate change, development and inequalities.

Addressing global imbalances in a cooperative manner is a core point of the international agenda, including the French presidency of the G7 in 2026. Which solutions could be explored to respond urgent and long-term issues?

With

- **Vikram Doraiswami** - High Commissioner for India in the UK
- **Emmanuelle Lachaussée** - Deputy Director General for Political and Security Affairs at the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs
- **Ann Pettifor** - Director of PRIME (Policy Research in Macroeconomics), author, and a fellow of the New Economics Foundation
- **William Roos** - Managing Director for Corporate Strategy at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Chaired by Philippe Wen – Financial Counsellor, Deputy Head of the Economic Department of the French Embassy to the UK

Gen Z's Political Split

21.10 – 22.20

Often seen as a progressive bloc, Gen Z is in fact deeply divided. In France, young voters increasingly back parties at opposite ends of the political spectrum. In the United States, recent polls point to a growing gender divide among under-30s, and in the UK, youth support is largely directed toward Labour, while many of their peers stay away from the polls altogether. Shaped by fragmented media ecosystems, this polarisation is reinforced by growing inequality, social decline, and distrust in politics.

With

- **Marie Boëton** - Journalist, Senior Reporter for *La Croix L'Hebdo*
- **Rosie Campbell** - Professor of Politics at King's College London
- **Roberto Foa** - Director of the Centre for the Future of Democracy, Cambridge University
- **Cole Stangler** - French American journalist

Chaired by Emma Connolly - Research Fellow in the Digital Speech Lab in the Department of Political Science at UCL

AI in the Classroom: Promise and Pitfalls

21.10 – 22.20

School as we knew it has come to an end. The AI revolution is going on, and is already reshaping how pupils learn and how teachers work. This major evolution raises questions, concerns, and hope. What choices around curricula, assessment and governance are needed for education systems to foster an ethical,

responsible digital culture? Can technologies contribute to address other unachieved challenges in education, such as equality?

With

- **Jonas Erin** - General Inspector for Education, Sport and Research, French Ministry for Education and Youth
- **Rebecca Eynon** - Professor of Education, the Internet and Society at the University of Oxford
- **Jasmine Sekou** – Stemettes volunteer and youth advocate in STEM education

Chaired by Maira Klyshbekova – Postdoctoral Research Associate in AI Education at King's College London

Closing Event with The DJ Sax

22.30 – 23.30

Join **The DJ Sax**, where DJ energy meets live saxophone. Sasha – aka The DJ Sax – is a mainstay of the entertainment scene, known for a high-energy set that fuse club sounds with live performance. From the O2 Arena to London's iconic KOKO and international stages, she'll bring infectious energy to end the Night of Ideas.
