

The Green Templeton Lectures 2026:

Innovation and the Future
of Health: Find, Fail, Fly

Report



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About the Green Templeton Lectures

The Green Templeton Lectures are an lecture series in which distinguished speakers explore a contemporary theme through a range of perspectives, including historical, political, educational and philosophical lenses. The lectures provides a space for interdisciplinary reflection on major issues shaping society.

The 2026 Lectures' Theme: Innovation and the Future of Health

Innovation in healthcare and life sciences is a rapidly evolving field and a central societal priority. In the context of urgent global health challenges and the expanding role of biotechnology and digital health, Oxford is uniquely positioned to convene researchers, thought leaders, practitioners and future innovators to exchange ideas and foster meaningful dialogue.

The 2026 Green Templeton Lecture Series explores how discovery, experimentation and translation drive progress in medicine and health. It considers the scientific, entrepreneurial and system-level shifts shaping the future of healthcare, while also reflecting on the broader state of the field and the conditions needed for innovation to flourish.

This year's theme builds further on The Oxford Health Innovation Forum, a university-wide initiative that the College launched in 2025, emphasising its strong legacy in medicine, medical sciences, business and management. The Forum brings together students, alumni, researchers, clinicians, start-up representatives, investors and industry professionals to explore the future of innovation in the medical and life sciences sectors. It serves as a platform through which the College fosters entrepreneurship and drives dialogue on innovation in medical research, healthcare delivery and global health.

The Green Templeton Lectures 2026 are proudly sponsored by Mills & Reeve.

About Mills & Reeve

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Lecture 3 - From Scientific Breakthrough to System Change: Lessons from Oxford Nanopore

Wednesday 3 June 2026 at Green Templeton College, University of Oxford

Hosted by Sir Michael Dixon (Principal of Green Templeton College) and Associate Fellow Dr Christiaan de Koning, Chair of the Oxford Health Initiative Forum



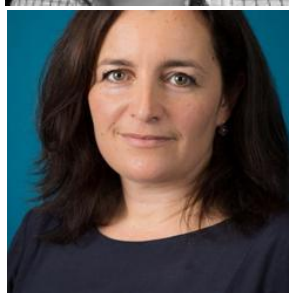
Professor Thomas Hellmann,

Senior Research Fellow at Green Templeton College and DP World Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Saïd Business School



Dr Mark Bruce,

Vice President of Sequencing Methods Research, Oxford Nanopore Technologies



Zoe McDougall,

Global Head and Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs, Oxford Nanopore Technologies

The third Green Templeton Lecture in the series Innovation and the Future of Health: Find, Fail, Fly was a fireside chat chaired by Professor Thomas Hellmann. Thomas was joined by Dr Mark Bruce and Zoe McDougall from Oxford Nanopore Technologies. Together their wide-ranging discussion explored the realities of scaling a science-led company, the influence of Oxford's unique entrepreneurial environment on its growth and the balance between science and commercial demands.

Both speakers reflected on what had led them to join Oxford Nanopore in the first place. Mark recalled that after his PhD he was looking for something more directly impactful, something that could make a real difference in people's lives. That desire led him to Oxford Nanopore. Zoe was seeking an interesting job. As the first non-researcher to join the company, her responsibility is to resolve national-scale policy priorities, a task she described as interesting and never dull.

Asked about the tension between scientists pursuing fundamental technology and the commercial demands of running a company, Mark and Zoe depicted Oxford Nanopore's development as consisting of two distinct phases. The first was almost entirely focused on developing the technology, which was still at its proof-of-concept stage. This first period largely consisted of the kind of research project a pure scientist would pursue. Most of the first 50-60 employees were scientists.

The second phase marked a deliberate shift towards commercialisation. A new applications team was created with the aim of finding a user base for the technology. The strategy was to release a small, accessible device quickly to a broad community. This approach built a community willing to give direct feedback to the scientists, which helped the company to develop its technology and expand its user base. Through this iterative process Oxford Nanopore eventually achieved impressive commercial results, with their products deployed in space and used in the field during Ebola outbreaks in Africa.



Both speakers noted that accomplishments like these are a genuine source of motivation for employees. Oxford Nanopore also works hard to keep its staff engaged. Selected employees attend external conferences and the company regularly invites outside speakers in. This encourages different perspectives to flow into the company, which helps it solve difficult problems.

Given how remarkable it is for small university-linked labs to grow into major companies, Thomas asked whether being based in Oxford had helped or limited Oxford Nanopore's achievements. Mark and Zoe were unanimous in their insistence that the company was fortunate to have started in Oxford. Mark explained that as a prestigious and international university city, Oxford offered the advantage of impressive local knowledge as a resource on which they could draw. Early investors were willing to support long-term innovation, which gave the company time to develop. Pressed for a downside, he mentioned that Oxford has many strong individual groups but lacks a single, unifying network connecting them.

Zoe added that patient capital was essential and that the timing was favourable as UK government policy direction aligned with the company's own goals at the time. She also pointed to the culture of ambition in Oxford in which others do not define what you can or cannot achieve.

In Mark's view, innovation is still at Oxford Nanopore's heart. While DNA sequencing was the company's starting point and remains highly informative for health and understanding how people respond to medicines, the speakers noted that most users are interested in biomarkers, an area where proteins offer more direct insight. The company's ambition is to build an all-in-one platform that brings protein sequencing alongside its existing DNA capabilities.

When pressed about the biggest challenges the company faced, Mark raised the difficulties of building new technologies and of getting people to adopt them. To overcome the latter, Zoe highlighted the importance of taking the lead, which inspires others to follow. Another way the company overcomes these challenges is through its open platform. The innovators who constitute the majority of their user base want to help the company fix problems when they spot them. By keeping the platform as open as possible, community-led and community-driven development for new applications can more readily occur.

For those who may be considering starting, joining, or scaling a start-up. Mark's advice was simple: do it. Zoe suggested that joining earlier rather than later in the process means seeing more of a company's journey, though she noted this depends on a person's career stage, personality, appetite for risk and preferred working environment.

Questions from the audience followed, with topics ranging from politics, technology, customer management, to partnerships and acquisitions. Both speakers concluded the day by saying they have no regrets about choosing Oxford Nanopore, good days and bad days alike.

