CMC
CIVIL MEDIATION COUNCIL

CMC CONFERENCE 2026
MAKING MEDIATION MAINSTREAM

7 & 8 October 2026, 12.30pm – 5.15pm

Join us from 12.30pm on 7 & 8 October for *Making Connections*, which offers you the chance to chat to colleagues before the formal start of the conference at 1pm.

Ticket includes admission to a face-to-face networking event at IDRC, London on the evening of the 7 October. Please sign up on Eventbrite.

BOOK YOUR CONFERENCE TICKET



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CMC Conference 2026
Making Mediation Mainstream

Day 1

Start in Main Conference Room

12.30 - 1.00	Making Connections - Join us for a pre-conference chat!
1.00 - 1.05	Welcome & Opening Remarks
1.05 - 1.45	The Next Chapter for Mediation: Perspectives from Practice and Civil Justice Reform - Amrik Kandola & Professor John Sorabji
1.45 - 2.15	CMC Update and What This Means for You! - CMC Chair Kelly Stricklin-Coutinho, CEO Victoria Harris & Deputy Chair Mediation Standards Board Andy Rogers
2.15 - 3.00	Deal making vs Peacebuilding - Peter Marsden, Concordis
3.00 - 3.15	Break

3.15 - 4.00	**Commercial**	**SEND**	**Community**	**Academic**
	When Founders Fall Out: Mediation at the Heart of Business Conflict Panel moderated by Carolyn Jones with Andrew Pepper, Chrystalla Spire & Mandeep Kaur Virdee	Strengthening SEND Mediation: Navigating Change with Purpose Discussion with the DfE hosted by Dominic Collis & Nicola Cleaver	Comms for Community Mediation – Story telling for Impact Beth Colson	Valuable Legal Education for Aspiring Human Mediators Professor Alex Nicholson

Return to Main Conference Room

4.00 - 4.30	Overcoming Deadlock in Mediation: Tips and Techniques for the Mediator – Eve Pienaar
4.30 - 5.00	Intercultural Fluency in Mediation: Inclusive Practice – Afsana Gibson Chowdhury & Claudia Haisman-Green
5.00 - 5.15	Day 1 Close
6.30 - 8.30	**Drinks & networking event at IDRC in London**

CMC Conference 2026
Making Mediation Mainstream

Day 2

Start in Main Conference Room

12.30 - 1.00	Making Connections - Join us for a pre-conference chat!
1.00 - 1.45	Facilitation, Mediation and UK Politics – Sir Julian Smith CBE MP, Visiting Professor in Practice, LSE, Mediation and Facilitation Initiative
1.45 - 2.30	Mediating at the Edge - Jane Gunn
2.30 - 2.45	Break

2.45 - 3.30	**Workplace**	**Peer**	**Legal**	**Professional Development**
	The Missing Piece? Mediation, Early Resolution and the Acas Code Panel discussion with Acas, Marie Coombes & Nick Pahl, moderated by Dionne Dury	Why Schools Say Yes: The Secret to Sustainable Peer Mediation School leader panel moderated by Ben Harper	Mediation by Order: The Emerging Post-Churchill Case Law that Every Dispute Resolver Needs to Know Robin Somerville	AI in Mediation: Ethics, Costs, Sustainability and Utility Roger Levitt, Mark Tsagas, Julia Burns & Graham Ross

Return to Main Conference Room

3.30 - 4.00	Designing Mediation for Neurodiversity: Building Processes that Work for Everyone – Marie Coombes & John Anderson
4.00 - 4.30	HMCTS Update
4.30 - 4.40	Conference Close
5.30 - 6.30	**CMC AGM** *The CMC AGM will take place on a separate link e-mailed to CMC members.*



Explore Conference Sessions



Making Connections

Join us for a networking session in small groups, bringing together delegates, conference speakers and CMC board members for an informal chat, giving you an opportunity to connect and exchange.

7 & 8 October, 12.30 – 1.00pm • Pre-Conference Chat



The Next Chapter for Mediation: Perspectives from Practice and Civil Justice Reform
Amrik Kandola & Professor John Sorabji

An experienced commercial mediator, Amrik Kandola spent more than 25 years at one of the world's leading commercial law firms and having qualified as a mediator in 2000, he has witnessed the evolution of mediation throughout his career. With John Sorabji, the Co-Director of UCL's Centre for Dispute Resolution and leading scholar on civil justice reform, he co-chairs the Civil Justice Council's Working Group on ADR. Together they will draw on their experience to reflect on the changing landscape for mediation and consider the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

7 October, 1 – 1.45pm • Keynote Day 1



CMC Update and what this means for you!
Kelly Stricklin-Coutinho, Victoria Harris & Andy Rogers

Hear directly from CMC leaders about the work underway to strengthen the mediation profession and what it means for mediators, providers and the wider dispute resolution community.

As the CMC continues to deliver its ambitious three-year strategy, this session will explore progress across government engagement, guidance for mediators, raising the profile of mediation and initiatives designed to change the culture around conflict for future generations. Speakers will also provide updates on the Mediation Standards Board and the CMC's new specialist groups, including the International and ED&I Working Groups.

More than a progress report, this session will focus on what these developments mean for mediators in practice. Learn how the CMC's new Mediator Launchpad coaching service is helping newer practitioners build successful mediation businesses, hear about opportunities to contribute to the profession's development, and gain insight into the trends and priorities likely to shape mediation in the years ahead. Whether you are a long-standing CMC member, a newly accredited mediator, or simply interested in the future direction of the profession, this session will provide a clear picture of where mediation is heading, the role the CMC is playing in that journey, and the opportunities emerging for mediators at every stage of their careers.

7 October, 1.45 – 2.15pm



Dealmaking vs Peacebuilding: The Transactional and the Sustainable

Peter Marsden, Concordis - Nobel Peace Prize Nominee

High-profile agreements, rapid-fire diplomacy and headline-grabbing accolades. Those taking a cursory glance at world events could be forgiven for feeling sceptical about the state of peacebuilding. This session invites you to consider the role of mediation and dialogue in delivering meaningful, lasting change.

7 October, 2.15 – 3pm



When Founders Fall Out: Mediation at the Heart of Business Conflict

Panel Discussion chaired by Carolyn Jones with Andrew Pepper, Chrystalla Spire and Mandeep Kaur Virdee

Founder disputes are among the most complex and emotionally charged commercial conflicts that mediators encounter. What may begin as a disagreement over strategy, roles, or equity can quickly escalate into disputes that threaten the future of a business, its employees, investors, and stakeholders. This panel, moderated by Carolyn Jones from the Civil Mediation Council's Commercial Working Group, will explore the unique dynamics of founder disputes, why they can be particularly challenging to resolve, and the skills and approaches that can help parties move towards agreement. Drawing on real-world experience, the panel will discuss common causes of founder conflict, practical mediation techniques, legal and commercial considerations, and lessons for mediators working in this increasingly important area of practice.

7 October, 3.15 – 4pm • Breakout Room



Strengthening SEND Mediation: Navigating Change with Purpose

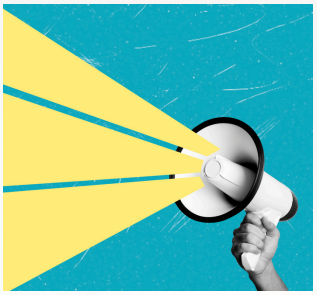
Panel discussion with the DfE hosted by Nicola Cleaver and Dominic Collis

This specialist SEND workshop, hosted by Nicola Cleaver & Dominic Collis of Collis Mediation Ltd, comes at a crucial moment for the SEND system as the sector prepares for the next phase of reform. Representatives from the Department for Education will be present to stay connected to the themes emerging from SEND mediation practice and to hear directly from the professionals working at the heart of statutory dialogue.

The session will also feature insight from the Deputy CEO and Director of Operations - Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, who's or-ganisation has recently navigated a period of reform with clarity, trans-parency and a strong focus on public trust. This perspective offers a powerful example of how systems can evolve in ways that strengthen delivery, improve accessibility and support better outcomes for families.

Drawing on themes emerging from the SEND reform consultation, this workshop will explore the issues shaping the future landscape and con-sider how statutory SEND mediation can continue to sharpen its effec-tiveness and deliver legally robust outcomes that genuinely meet the needs of children, young people and their families. It is an essential ses-sion for practitioners who want to stay informed, solution-focused and ready for the changes ahead.

7 October, 3.15 – 4pm • Breakout Room



Comms for Community Mediation: Storytelling for Impact
Beth Colson

Community mediation services deliver vital work in often complex and sensitive situations, yet many organisations face the challenge of communicating their impact with limited time, capacity, and budget. Added to this is the confidential nature of mediation itself, which can make storytelling feel particularly difficult. Led by Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Beth Colson, this practical breakout session will explore simple, effective ways community mediation services can showcase their value through authentic and ethical storytelling. Designed for staff, volunteers, and service leaders, the session will provide accessible ideas and tools to help organisations strengthen their communications, raise awareness, and demonstrate impact without needing a dedicated communications strategy or large budget.

7 October, 3.15 – 4pm • Breakout Room



Valuable Legal Education for Aspiring Human Mediators
Professor Alex Nicholson

Most students choose to study law because they see it as a route into the legal profession, and recent civil justice reforms mean that mediation has an increasingly important role to play in the legal services market. One response might be to embed mediation training more systematically within legal education, but this oversimplifies the problem. My research suggests that legal educators can't agree on the purpose of a law degree; is it primarily about preparing for professional practice, or is it better understood as a broader public good? At the same time, generative artificial intelligence is beginning to redefine what it means to practise law, and the marketisation of higher education means growing pressure on law schools to prioritise the recall and application of established legal rules. In this session, I will consider what it means to educate lawyers in this changing context, using mediation as a particularly important example of a lawyerly practice that will continue to rely on human skills, such as judgement, empathy and trust.

7 October, 3.15 – 4pm • Breakout Room



Overcoming Deadlock in Mediation: Tips and Techniques for the Mediator
Eve Pienaar

Delivered by experienced full-time mediator and CMC Fellow, Eve Pienaar, this practical 30-minute session explores how the mediator can help parties overcome deadlock. Drawing on her experience of 20 years as a commercial mediator, Eve will share thoughts and tips on how to avoid deadlock and also what process or other interventions can help extricate parties from deadlock. Most mediations will encounter roadblocks on the day. The skill of the mediator is keeping options open, a vision of a better future alive and identifying creative solutions to enable settlement. Eve will share some examples of what has worked to break deadlock, based on practical case studies from her experience as full-time commercial mediator.

7 October, 4 – 4.30pm



Intercultural Fluency in Mediation: Inclusive Practice
Afsana Gibson Chowdhury & Claudia Haisman-Green

As mediation becomes increasingly embedded within the UK's evolving justice system, mediators must critically examine their ability to effectively serve a diverse and multicultural population facing complex social and cultural issues. This session explores blind spots that can affect neutrality, communication, trust, and participation and challenge mediators to consider how they can break down barriers, build cultural awareness, and make genuine room for all voices within the mediation process.

7 October, 4.30 – 5pm



Facilitation, Mediation and UK Politics
Sir Julian Smith CBE MP, Visiting Professor in Practice, LSE, Mediation and Facilitation Initiative

As politics becomes increasingly polarised, how can mediation and facilitation help broker better outcomes and reduce the temperature of debate and of policy disagreements.

8 October, 1 – 1.45pm • Keynote Day 2



Mediating at the Edge
Jane Gunn

What happens in the workplace when someone wants to Blow the Whistle on a person or a practice – something they have seen, heard or experienced that they would like to report but are afraid to do so?

Whistleblowing is often regarded as a "Hot Potato" in organisations. For a variety of reasons:

- Involves strong emotions
- Issues of safety and protection
- May involve serious allegations

And so, the question is whether and when mediation is appropriate.

In this session, Jane Gunn will share her own perspective and experiences and discuss the challenges and benefits of using mediation in such cases.

8 October, 1.45 – 2.30pm • Keynote Day 2



The Missing Piece? Mediation, Early Resolution and the Acas Code

Panel discussion chaired by Dionne Dury with Acas, Marie Coombes & Nick Pahl

The inclusion of mediation in the new draft Acas Code of Practice is a welcome step forward — but does it go far enough? Come and hear directly from Acas, alongside an expert panel of mediators, as we explore the proposed changes and, crucially, what needs to happen next. With the opportunity to put your questions to ACAS and debate how early resolution can become a genuine part of workplace culture, we'll look beyond the Code to the bigger picture: the real financial and human cost of conflict, the impact on health and wellbeing, and what organisations can do to intervene before disputes escalate to potentially damaging processes and an already stretched tribunal system. The reference to mediation in the new draft Code is a welcome development. But if we really want to prevent conflict from escalating, how much further do we need to go?

8 October, 2.45 – 3.30pm • Breakout Room



Why Schools Say Yes: The Secret to Sustainable Peer Mediation

School leader panel moderated by Ben Harper

Ever wondered what makes a head teacher champion peer mediation? This interactive session brings together school leaders to share what convinced them to introduce peer mediation, the difference it has made to pupils and school culture, and how it supports stronger relationships across the wider community. We will also hear how involving parents can amplify impact and give programmes longevity. A must-attend session for existing and aspiring peer mediation trainers seeking practical strategies for securing school buy-in, building sustainable programmes, and making mediation mainstream.

8 October, 2.45 – 3.30pm • Breakout Room



Mediation by Order: The Emerging Post-Churchill Case Law Every Dispute Resolver Needs to Know

Robin Somerville

The debate over whether parties can be compelled to mediate is over. The real question now is how the courts are using their powers and what happens when parties fail to cooperate. This session explores the key judicial developments since Churchill v Merthyr Tydfil, examining the cases that are shaping the boundaries of court ordered mediation and redefining expectations around participation in ADR. Robin, a leading commercial mediator and barrister with experience spanning more than 1,000 disputes, will analyse the latest authorities, discuss emerging trends, and consider the particular question of timing. If the court is going to order mediation, or a stay for voluntary mediation, what factors will be influential in identifying the best window within which the parties might seek a resolution?

Designed for lawyers, mediators and dispute resolution professionals, this session offers a clear and practical guide to one of the most significant developments in civil justice in recent years.

8 October, 2.45 – 3.30pm • Breakout Room



AI in Mediation: Ethics, Costs, Sustainability and Utility
Julia Burns, Mark Tsagas, Roger Levitt & Graham Ross

Artificial intelligence is already influencing mediation practice, from case preparation and document analysis to communication and process support. As such, the focus of the debate has shifted from the question 'will AI be used in mediation?' to 'how can AI be used responsibly, ethically and to the benefit of the process?'.
This panel brings together individuals who have been supporting the CMC Mediation Standards Board with their examination of the implications of AI for the mediation profession. Drawing on the findings of a recent sector-wide consultation, the discussion will explore the opportunities AI presents, the risks it creates, and the practical guidance mediators may need to ensure that technology enhances rather than undermines the core values of mediation.

Join us for a timely conversation about the future of mediation practice and the enduring importance of human judgment, trust and empathy.

8 October, 2.45 – 3.30pm • Breakout Room



Designing Mediation for Neurodiversity: Building Processes that Work for Everyone
Marie Coombes & John Anderson

What can complaints teach us about the mediation process? As the CMC receives an increasing number of complaints involving neurodivergent individuals, there is an opportunity for the profession to reflect on how mediation processes are experienced by those with different communication styles, needs and ways of engaging with conflict.

Bringing together perspectives from mediation practice, complaints handling and neurodiversity expertise, this panel will explore how greater awareness and understanding can help mediators design more accessible and inclusive processes. Delegates will gain practical insights into supporting neurodivergent participants while enhancing the quality and effectiveness of mediation for everyone.

8 October, 3.30 - 4pm



HMCTS Update

This session, led by speakers from HMCTS, will provide an update on the implementation of automatic referral to mediation within the Small Claims process. The speakers will share the latest data and insights on uptake and outcomes, discuss lessons learned to date, and explore the potential future direction for this important initiative.

8 October, 4 – 4.45pm

BOOK YOUR TICKET