Critical sustainability research

The University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL) is uniquely placed to partner with organisations to develop knowledge for private sector action on sustainability. Working with business, government and financial institutions, we focus on the following four themes:

Zero carbon | Circular economy | Protection of nature | Inclusive and resilient societies

We address problems in a rigorous and timely fashion, informed by robust analysis and evidence. Our clear problem focus delivers knowledge over a useful decision horizon:

1. Prince of Wales Fellowships
Programmes of research and experimentation on sustainability problems, co-designed with and for industry. Alongside advances in fundamental knowledge, Fellows produce new ‘transdisciplinary’ thinking on sustainability, with practical insights and recommendations for decision-makers to carry into their organisations.

Duration: 3-5 years
Resourcing: £120 - £150k per annum

2. Research sprints
In-depth explorations of specific challenges conducted by well-resourced, multi-skilled teams of technical, scientific, business, finance and policy experts tasked with making substantial, potentially breakthrough, progress over short spaces of time. The start-up phase of a sprint is typically 3-6 months, followed by a 6-12 month delivery period.

Duration: 12-18 months
Resourcing: £300k - £1.5m

3. Thought leadership
Powerful insights into how business and financial institutions can build a sustainable economy, generated for and with partners based on robust evidence and insight. Includes frameworks, tools, models, analyses, evaluation and case studies to inform business practice, influence policy and enrich education programmes.

Duration: 1-2 years
Resourcing: £50 - £250k per annum

4. Centres, labs and thematic funding
Multi-year partnerships drawing on the full range of intellectual resources offered by the University of Cambridge and CISL's expertise in delivering practical, business-relevant solutions through experimentation, thought leadership and advocacy.

Duration: Multi-year
Resourcing: >£1m

5. Graduate research
Conducted by students on our Master's in Sustainability Leadership programme over a year. The results offer important insights into business- and finance-related problems, and can form the basis of longer-term studies for successive cohorts of students, or contribute to deeper dives conducted by CISL researchers.

Duration: 1-2 years
Resourcing: £30 - £40k

6. Commissioned research
Bespoke thought leadership for specific clients and needs, commissioned through partnerships, RFPs and open calls.

Duration: 6-24 months
Resourcing: £50 - £300k

Further information
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