



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Institute for
Sustainability
Leadership



From Innovation to Impact: Scaling Climate Solutions to Transform Markets



The University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership

CISL is an impact-led institute within the University of Cambridge that activates leadership globally to transform economies for people, nature and climate. Through its global network and hubs in Cambridge, Cape Town and Brussels, CISL works with leaders and innovators across business, finance and government to accelerate action for a sustainable future. Trusted since 1988 for its rigour and pioneering commitment to learning and collaboration, the Institute creates safe spaces to challenge and support those with the power to act.

Publication details

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Foreword

James Cole

Executive Director,
Chief Innovation Officer, CISL



While digital disruption and geopolitical tensions dominate headlines, markets are being reshaped by climate change, nature loss and resource pressures. Together, these forces are redefining risk, resilience and competitiveness for companies across every sector. Value will be won and lost at unprecedented speed and scale.

Many commercially viable solutions already exist, and disruptive innovation presents new opportunity. Yet many promising solutions remain under-scaled and under-leveraged, not for lack of innovation, but because capital, policy and market systems fail to align.

Our role at the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL) is to help close this gap.

As an institute of the University of Cambridge, we work at the intersection of academia, business, finance and policy to translate promising ideas into real-world impact. Based in Cambridge and operating globally, we support innovation across the economy, from early-stage ventures to corporates, industry coalitions and policymakers, focusing on interventions that reshape markets, not just individual projects.

Our innovation offer extends beyond startup support. We help corporates

understand, pilot and adopt new technologies and business models, support investors to align capital with credible solutions, and work with policymakers to strengthen the conditions that reward sustainable performance.

A key part of this work is Canopy, CISL's international innovation community of over 500 startups, corporates and investors, convened at the Entopia Building in central Cambridge. Canopy provides a focal point for collaboration and feeds directly into our wider industry and policy engagement.

Transforming economic systems requires co-ordinated progress across technology, capital, deployment and regulation. This report celebrates five years of our startup support programmes, and sets out how CISL brings these elements together and how organisations can partner with us to engage with the next generation of market-defining solutions.

CISL's approach to systems innovation

Our approach starts from a simple insight: breakthrough solutions do not scale on technology alone. They succeed when incentives, capabilities, norms and rules evolve to support them.

We therefore focus not only on advancing technological innovation but also on strengthening the market context in which it operates, combining strategic insight into market evolution with practical interventions in the sectors where infrastructure is built and investment decisions are made.



1 Diagnose and set direction:

We help partners navigate emerging risks and opportunities, identifying interventions capable of unlocking tipping points and shaping long-term competitiveness.



2 Align actors

We convene business, finance, innovators and policymakers to build shared direction and momentum where fragmentation would otherwise slow progress.



3 Accelerate uptake

We connect innovators with corporates, investors and decision-makers to test, refine and deploy solutions in real-world settings.



4 Strengthen enabling conditions

We work to improve policy, regulatory and financial frameworks so sustainable solutions can compete on fair terms.



5 Reinforce the ecosystem

We enhance access to capital, networks and market insight. Through Canopy and our global partnerships, promising models move beyond isolated examples.



Cambridge: a powerhouse for sustainable innovation

CISL: a system-level catalyst for scalable solutions



Cambridge is one of the world's leading centres of science, technology and entrepreneurship. As part of the University of Cambridge, CISL is embedded in a globally recognised ecosystem of research excellence, entrepreneurial talent and investment capital. Knowledge-intensive firms in the region generate around £25 billion in annual turnover – widely recognised as the world's #1 science and technology cluster by intensity – reflecting both scientific depth and a sustained record of venture creation.

This concentration of researchers, founders and investors provides fertile ground for discovery and company formation. Long established as a biotechnology powerhouse, Cambridge is now also home to one of the highest-density climate science and deep tech ecosystems globally, spanning energy systems, advanced materials, AI-enabled optimisation, sustainable manufacturing and battery innovation. Research translation is accelerated through Cambridge Enterprise, climate-focused student entrepreneurship through Cambridge Zero, and venture builders and accelerators include CISL, Cambridge Future Tech, Carbon13, Deeptech Labs and the Maxwell Centre. Together, these create a high-throughput pipeline of intellectual property (IP)-rich ventures supported by capital, laboratory infrastructure and experienced founders.

Yet translating discovery into widespread market adoption requires co-ordination, market insight and access to decision-makers. It is at this interface between research, deployment and capital that CISL plays a distinct anchoring role.

Operating at the intersection of academia, business, finance and policy, CISL focuses on sustainability-led innovation and on strengthening the pathway from technical credibility to commercial relevance. Our position within the University provides access to leading researchers and laboratories, while our global networks connect innovation to senior decision-makers across multinational corporations, financial institutions and governments.

In this role, CISL acts as both filter and connector, identifying high-potential solutions, strengthening them through applied market insight and strategic positioning, and linking them to partners for piloting, procurement and growth. Through Canopy and our international hubs, Cambridge innovation connects to global markets and institutions, accelerating adoption in sectors where credibility and institutional access are critical.

Over the past five years, CISL has supported more than 500 entrepreneurs and early-stage ventures. For investors, this creates structured access to a curated pipeline emerging from one of the world's most productive research clusters, supported not only by technical excellence but also by networks capable of accelerating deployment at scale.

Our Impact

#1

the world's leading
science and
technology
cluster

part of the
CAMBRIDGE
ecosystem

26

**billion-dollar
businesses**
born in
Cambridge

home to

4700+

knowledge intensive
firms

5 YEARS
of innovation programmes
at **CISL**

22 Programmes delivered

500+ startups supported

3 years recognised by the
FT as one of Europe's Leading
Startup Hubs

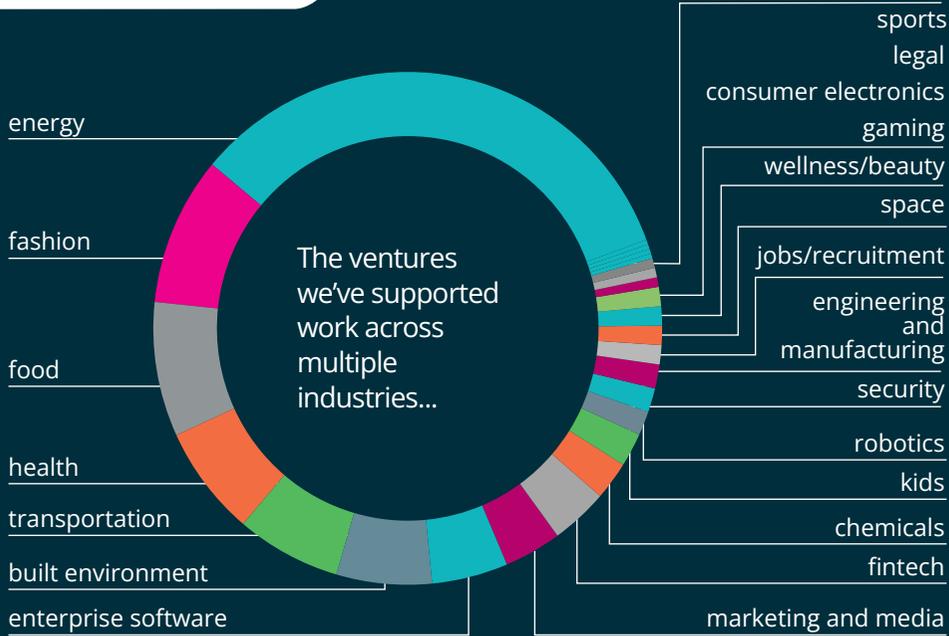
£650m + in funding rounds

Companies collectively valued at
£4.1 billion

Employing **5000+** people

Gaining access to
CISL's global network of
40,000 leaders

Our Impact



...and are supported by a network of international partners



Portfolio showcase



Over the past five years, CISL has supported over 500 ventures to scale through our Canopy innovation community and accelerator programmes. The following case studies provide a snapshot of our portfolio ventures and the support provided through CISL. The innovators featured here represent just a small sample of the many teams driving impactful solutions across the CISL Canopy community.



Smart ventilation for the mass retrofit revolution

AirEx Technologies is a UK cleantech company addressing the long-standing issue of poor ventilation and heat loss in older homes. Traditional air bricks enable airflow but often undermine energy efficiency, leading many homeowners to seal them – reintroducing damp and mould risks.

AirEx's solution is the Floorvent – a 'smart air brick' equipped with Internet-of-Things (IoT) sensors that automatically regulate ventilation to maintain energy efficiency and prevent moisture build-up. The system reduces household energy costs by around 10–12 per cent and cuts carbon emissions by roughly seven tonnes per property over its lifetime. Over 37,000 units have been installed in the UK, with the potential to abate up to 370 million tonnes of emissions across Europe.

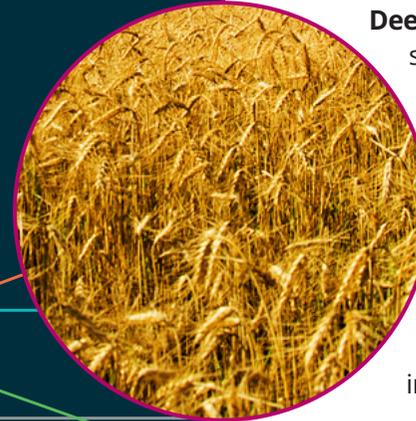
Through the Built Environment accelerator and ongoing engagement with CISL, AirEx accessed expert guidance, market insight and CISL's network of corporates, policymakers and fellow founders at a critical stage of commercialisation. CISL's support helped strengthen the company's credibility with investors and public-sector stakeholders, accelerating progress from pilot to market-ready deployment.

AirEx leveraged Innovate UK grants and secured £4.1 million in Series A funding, co-led by Barclays' Sustainable Impact Capital and Nesta Impact Fund. With government approval for inclusion in national energy-efficiency schemes, AirEx stands at the forefront of the £360 billion UK retrofit market, illustrating how innovation, policy alignment and social impact can drive scalable climate-tech solutions.



"CISL gave AirEx access to the right networks, helping us engage confidently with investors and policymakers and take part in wider industry and policy conversations."

Agnes Czako
Founder
and CEO



"CISL's team has been incredibly supportive, not just through mentoring, but by sharing deep sector insight and connecting us quickly to the right people. For a startup, that kind of practical guidance is invaluable."

Sushma Shankar
Co-founder
and CEO

AI soil intelligence for climate-resilient agriculture

Deep Planet, an agri-tech startup, is transforming soil intelligence through an AI-powered geospatial platform that delivers real-time soil and crop insights to the agriculture industry.

Using over ten years of satellite data, around 20 terabytes in total, the company's model analyses soil moisture, plant stress and yield potential, converting complex data into plain-language insights for immediate decision-making.

Initially focused on the wine industry, Deep Planet is now expanding across agricultural sectors, serving producers seeking to optimise yields, enhance resilience and manage drought risk. The technology also extends to government and financial applications, enabling climate monitoring and risk assessment for infrastructure and investment portfolios.

Backed by the European Space Agency, Deep Planet has demonstrated both technological credibility and commercial traction. Its participation in CISL's Women in Sustainable Innovation accelerator provided business mentoring, investor access and strategic partnership support, critical in building scale and market readiness.

In an era of declining soil fertility and rising food demand, Deep Planet exemplifies how data-driven sustainability technologies can deliver both financial returns and long-term planetary resilience.



deepplanet

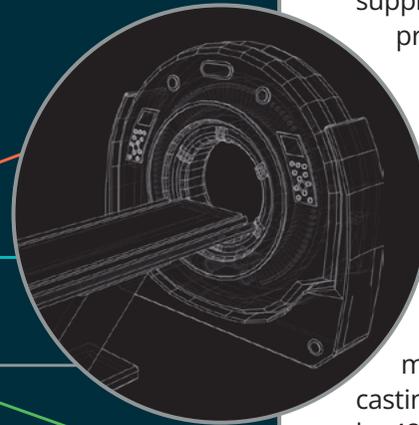
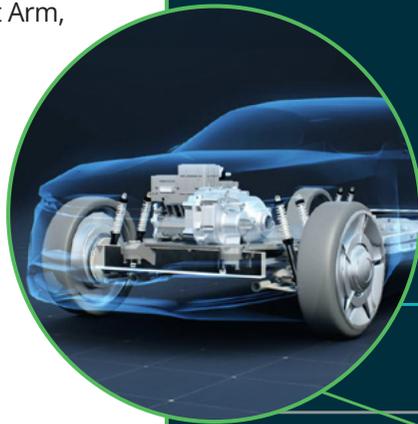
Scaling AI innovation for the global motor market

Dominic Vergine, former Head of Sustainability at Arm, co-founded **Monumo** to tackle one of industry's largest untapped opportunities – boosting efficiency in electric motors, which account for over 50 per cent of global electricity use. Combining expertise in physics, AI and advanced engineering, Monumo has developed Anser AI, a proprietary optimisation engine capable of running millions of simulations daily to redesign motors for maximum performance and minimal material use.

The technology delivers measurable economic advantages: a 30–40 per cent reduction in rare earth dependency, 15–20 per cent lower unit production costs, and a significant increase in operational efficiency. With applications across automotive, industrial and renewable energy sectors, the addressable market for efficient motor technologies exceeds US\$100 billion.

Since joining CISL's Canopy community in 2022, Monumo has leveraged access to investors, partners and policy expertise to accelerate its growth trajectory. A £10.5 million seed round led by Deeptech Labs in 2024 validated both its technical breakthrough and commercial readiness.

Now preparing for Series A expansion, Monumo continues to draw on CISL's support to refine impact measurement, engage policy networks and connect with clean-energy value chains, demonstrating how CISL's innovation ecosystem helps convert breakthrough cleantech ideas into scalable, investable solutions driving both financial returns and systemic sustainability gains.



"Being associated with CISL has given us great exposure to investors, partners, and talent – it builds credibility and strengthens how the company is perceived."

Dominic Vergine
Co-Founder
Monumo



"CISL provides us with access, context and reach, while we bring real-world data and rigorous systems that align with their mission."

Dr Spencer Brennan
Founder

Precision data for the low carbon economy

Neutreeno is redefining how companies reduce supply chain emissions and costs. Its proprietary process-network models deliver highly accurate product carbon-footprint mapping while requiring 90 per cent less data than traditional methods. This enables clients to pinpoint inefficiencies, cut emissions and reduce costs faster, turning climate action into operational advantage.

An early success with Japanese turbine manufacturer AeroEdge showcased the model's power. Neutreeno's analysis revealed casting inefficiencies that, once fixed, reduced waste by 48 per cent, cut emissions by 41 per cent, and saved €1.6 million annually.

Today, Neutreeno is working with organisations including National Grid, General Motors and Sony, advancing its goal of setting a global benchmark for accelerated decarbonisation. As a CISL Canopy member and an alumni company of CISL's Product Launch Accelerator programme, Neutreeno has benefitted from access to policy expertise, investor networks and introductions to major corporates including L'Oréal via the Sustainable Innovation Accelerator programme.

Backed by US\$5 million in seed funding, Neutreeno positions itself as a catalyst for the US\$7 trillion low carbon economy – an 'emissions-to-performance engine' powering measurable climate and business outcomes.

Biomaterials redefining sustainable luxury



Founded in 2020 by Cambridge materials scientist Dr Yudi Ding, **PACT** is pioneering Oval, a scalable, collagen-based supple material that offers a natural alternative to plastic-derived coated textiles. Developed from Ding's PhD research at the University of Cambridge, the material blends environmental responsibility with the desirability and durability demanded by the luxury fashion industry.

PACT's concept took shape after Ding attended CISL's Sustainable Fashion Accelerator programme, where exposure to top luxury houses revealed both the scale of the fashion industry's challenges and its appetite for low-impact materials. As a member of CISL's Canopy innovation community, PACT leveraged these connections to accelerate product validation and investor engagement.

The company's commercial potential is clear: €10.7 million in seed capital followed by a US\$20 million Series A in 2025 to scale production at its new Cambridge facility. PACT has benefitted from access to industry networks provided by CISL, technical expertise and peer collaboration.

PACT



"CISL has been a catalyst for our journey. The community brings together innovators who see sustainability not as a limitation, but as the foundation for the next generation of profitable, planet-positive products."

Dr Yudi Ding
Founder



Decentralised water systems for a thirsty planet

WOTA, a Japanese startup solving water resource issues, is redefining how emergency and everyday water needs are met through compact, decentralised recycling systems. Its flagship products, Portable Water Regeneration System 'WOTA BOX' and Water Regeneration Handwashing Stand 'WOSH', recycle up to 98 per cent of wastewater on site, providing safe water for showers and handwashing without relying on water and sewer infrastructure. This model offers a scalable answer to two converging risks: deterioration of water supply finance of ageing, capital-intensive water networks, and increasing water scarcity and pollution resulting from rapidly growing freshwater demand in cities worldwide.

The company's impact was starkly illustrated after the 2024 Noto Peninsula earthquake, when conventional water systems failed for extended periods. More than 100 WOTA BOX and 200 WOSH were deployed to evacuation centres, helping maintain hygiene and reduce disease risk while public infrastructure was repaired. Recognised as an Earthshot Prize finalist, WOTA is now expanding from disaster response into the residential market, with pilots in Japan and other regions such as the Caribbean.

Participation in CISL's X-Hub programme has helped WOTA sharpen its go-to-market approach, stress-test its business model and build a network in Europe. For investors, WOTA offers a differentiated, defensible technology platform in a structurally growing global water market.



"For an overseas company entering Europe, the depth and breadth of CISL's expertise and network are invaluable – and the strong credibility that comes with being based in a globally recognised innovation hub like Cambridge really matters."

Tomohito Okuda
Head of Business
Development for the
EMEA region

WOTA

Join our sustainability innovation community



Canopy workspace



We accelerate sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship through our community of founders, startups, corporate intrapreneurs, investors and sector-focused experts. We support and incubate entrepreneurs to accelerate the impact of their ventures, helping major organisations harness innovation as an integral part of commercial strategy, innovation and transformation programmes. We work with partners to influence policy and the finance system to shape the macro environment for sustainability innovation to scale.

Our startup accelerators, and sector-focused innovation hubs in Food and Agriculture, Built Environment, Manufacturing and Materials, and Cleantech take a whole-systems view of innovation to build knowledge, partnerships and networks, influence change and scale solutions.

In 2023 CISL opened the doors the Entopia building, CISL's HQ and the physical home of the Canopy Innovation Community. Located in central Cambridge, the Entopia building is a dynamic hub where innovation, academia, industry and policy converge.

For startups, scaleups and entrepreneurs, Canopy membership provides access to a network of impact-led founders; an event programme designed to support business growth; workspace within our award-winning coworking space; and access to CISL's wider network of investment, policy and industry leaders.

Beyond Cambridge the Canopy Community supports high potential, high impact startups through our virtual Canopy membership.

"Canopy is our go-to ecosystem for support and networking for our mission to reduce emissions from the built environment. It really helps to be in a flagship low-emission building, to meet local stakeholders from energy networks, councils and academia. Above all we learn from our co-tenants and peers of mission-driven sustainability startups and scale-ups."

Founders of Advanced Infrastructure Christopher Jackson and Lily Cairns Haylor

Accelerator Programmes



CISL is partnering with **L'Oréal** through a Sustainable Innovation Accelerator to identify, pilot and scale solutions addressing the beauty industry's most pressing challenges – from low carbon processes and alternative ingredients to water resilience, circular packaging and inclusive business models. The initiative combines Cambridge's research and innovation ecosystem with CISL's global network of startups, investors and experts, creating a curated pipeline of high-potential solutions ready for deployment across L'Oréal's operations and supply chain.

“As we work with our ecosystem to pave the way for a more sustainable future, we know we must be even more intentional in advancing and scaling pioneering solutions.”

Ezgi Barcenas
Chief Corporate Responsibility Officer,
L'Oréal Groupe



CISL partners with **BSI** on a multi-year Trust in Sustainability initiative to accelerate the development of digital tools that deliver trust and best practice for the world's most pressing sustainability challenges. To date, the partnership has supported three global cohorts covering topics such as built environment, climate finance, carbon markets, and transparent value chains, bridging the integrity gap between ambition and measurable impact. By combining CISL's sustainability expertise with BSI's 125-year heritage in fostering trust, the collaboration provides a rigorous testing ground for long-term business resilience.

“Trust in Sustainability brings BSI's purpose to life by turning our shared ambitions with CISL into real-world impact, using innovation and ecosystem collaboration to accelerate progress towards a fair society and a sustainable world.”

Wendy Niu
Sustainability Innovation Lab Manager, BSI

How can you work with us?

For startups:

Join the Canopy Community, our international sustainability innovation community of over 500 entrepreneurs, corporations and investors. Join our mailing list for opportunities to join accelerator cohorts and networking events.

For venture investors:

Join our Canopy VC investor list for invitations to demo days and to be notified of portfolio companies raising funding rounds.

For corporates:

We support you to develop commercially competitive innovation roadmaps and strategy and run targeted Accelerate and Pilot Programmes. Join our Corporate Leaders Groups shape policy and connect with leading peers.

For trade and investment departments:

We offer 'soft landings', market immersion and international programmes to scale solutions across boundaries.

Contact
canopy@cisl.cam.ac.uk
to explore how you can partner with us

meet the team



**James
Cole**

James Cole brings over 15 years of expertise at the intersection of business, sustainability, and innovation. As a senior leader at CISL, he oversees business policy and finance initiatives, empowering leaders and institutions to drive systemic sustainability. In 2022, he launched The Canopy, CISL's Cambridge-based incubator for impact-driven startups and innovators.

Previously, James worked at Friends of the Earth, launched a digital media startup, developed Vodafone UK partnerships, and implemented sustainable agriculture projects in Peru. He also serves as a trustee for The Partnering Initiative and PECT, with academic credentials in Rural Estate Management and Leadership for Sustainable Development.



**Sam
Laakkonen**

Sam started with Accenture as a management consultant before being headhunted to his first startup, FirstMark Communications Europe, which raised the largest telecommunications Series A round in European history (\$1.5 billion). Since then, he has been an early employee at Spotify, privately invested in 25+ startups, had 3 further exits from his own companies, helped 250+ startups accelerate growth, and works as an expert for the European Commission to distribute EIC equity and grant funding.

Sam has been active in the Techstars ecosystem for many years, having been an Entrepreneur-In-Residence for Techstars Amsterdam, and a Lead Mentor on several programmes including Techstars Lisbon, Techstars Korea, Techstars Boulder and Techstars Energy in Oslo, amongst others. Sam's focus has always been disruptive innovation and how to leverage technology for sustainability and impact.



**Viola
Jardon**

Viola has over 20 years' experience working in the technology and creative sectors in both Asia and the UK. Prior to joining CISL, she was part of the founding team establishing the London Fashion Fund, which supported start-ups and entrepreneurs to address innovation and sustainability in the fashion industry. Originally from Taiwan, Viola is a native Mandarin speaker with strong intercultural knowledge that would benefit businesses seeking to move into the Asian market. At CISL in the Canopy team, she works with hundreds of early-stage sustainability innovation startups, partnering with corporates, investors and innovators. In CISL's Accelerator, we are bridging gaps and empowering sustainability innovations.



**Jie
Zhou**

Jie Zhou is a circular economy expert with over 15 years of experience driving sustainability through a systems-thinking approach. At the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), she co-founded The Canopy, an incubator and innovation hub, and leads initiatives like SME decarbonization toolkits and global accelerator programs.

Jie also heads the Sino-UK Centre for Sustainability Innovation, fostering collaboration between the UK and China. A DE&I advocate and recipient of the University of Cambridge Vice-Chancellor's Social Impact Award, she advises institutions globally and champions sustainable innovation across cultures and industries.



**Zoë
Loughlin**

Zoë manages the Canopy, CISL's Cambridge workspace and global community for impact-driven startups, small businesses and entrepreneurs. Zoë has over a decade of experience in sustainability across the public, third sectors, and innovation ecosystems, specializing in waste reduction, recycling, and sustainable food systems. She has worked with organizations such as Sustain, WasteWatch, Glopolis, and Green Alliance, and co-founded a social enterprise focused on food waste reduction.

Zoë has also held voluntary leadership roles with Cambridge FoodCycle and Cambridge Sustainable Food.

Our community says...



“CISL Canopy has been instrumental in propelling SkenarioLabs forward on our journey. The connections we’ve made within the CISL Canopy community have been invaluable, opening doors to new opportunities and collaborations that we wouldn’t have accessed otherwise.”

Tom Somers *UK&I Director of SkenarioLabs and Trust in Sustainability Accelerate and Pilot Programme member*

“As an international clean tech investor we have found CISL to be enormously helpful in both putting UK start ups on the global map, through for example, its proactive assistance in organizing the TERA-Award global climate tech competition, as well as its specialist focus areas such as sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), where its work has helped key stakeholders understand and develop their strategic approaches to SAF.”

Jason Cheng *CEO and Managing Partner, Kerogen Capital*

“Our partnership with CISL supports ventures with transformative climate innovations and helps unlock their potential for global impact.”

Thomas Davin *Director, UNICEF Office of Innovation*

“Driving sustainable innovation is an important facet of The Crown Estate’s strategy, helping us create economic, social and environmental value for the UK. Partnering with CISL to help deliver this sustainable innovation fits well with our work in the sector, and we’re excited to see the partnership grow and flourish.”

Matthew Sampson *Regeneration Director, The Crown Estate*

“The Cambridge CISL programme has been incredible. The speakers are top-tier, and the programme managers really go out of their way to understand each startup’s unique needs, pairing us with mentors who deliver quick, actionable results.”

Isaure Courcenet *Founder, Initiativ*

“The collaboration with BSI and the Canopy has opened doors to a diverse and inclusive network, which will undoubtedly benefit KlimateNet in the long term.”

Anne-France Kennedy *Co-founder & CEO, KlimateNet*

Why businesses work with us

For over 35 years, we have worked with businesses and finance to address the most important sustainability challenges and create value for future competitiveness. Businesses come to us for our:

Impact

We are an impact-led, not-for-profit Institute of the University of Cambridge.

Thought leadership

We use our leading-edge business and academic research to develop business approaches to driving resilience and value.

Connectivity

We have unparalleled access to business and policy leaders, innovators and academics.

Network

We work with our global network of over 40,000 leaders and industry practitioners to build practical and actionable approaches for business to create value and resilience.

Global influence

We have offices and hubs in the UK, Brussels, South Africa, Singapore and Australia, and deliver programmes globally.





Cambridge insight, policy influence, business impact

The University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL) brings together business, government and academia to find solutions to critical sustainability challenges.

Capitalising on the world-class, multidisciplinary strengths of the University of Cambridge, we deepen leaders' insight and understanding through our executive programmes; build deep, strategic engagement with leadership companies; and create opportunities for collaborative enquiry and action through our leadership groups.

Over more than 30 years we have built up a leadership network of nearly 40,000 leaders and practitioners from business, government and civil society, who have an impact in every sector and on every continent. Their experience and insights shape our work, which is further underpinned by multidisciplinary academic research. His Majesty King Charles III is CISL's Royal Founding Patron and has inspired and supported many of the Institute's initiatives, during his time as the Prince of Wales.

