

2024–25

Annual Report

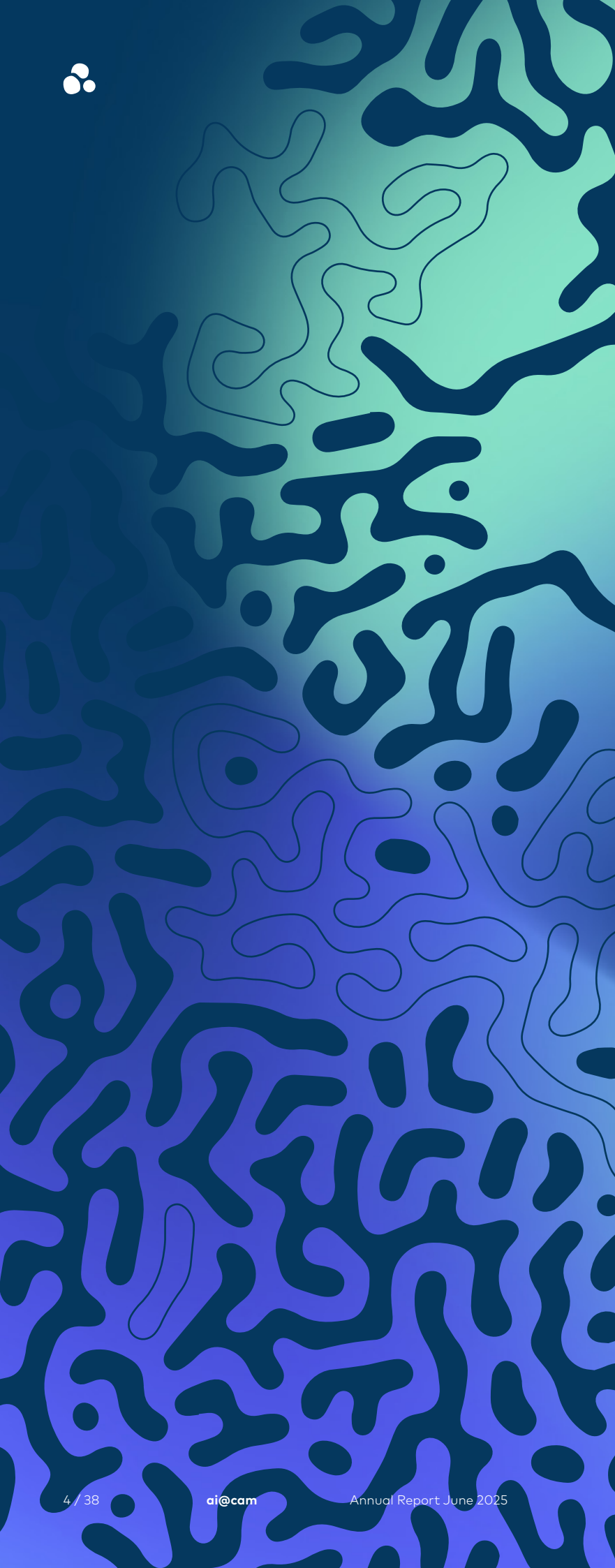


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3000

People

6

Schools of the University

58

Departments

£9M+

Funding proposals submitted
(May 2025)

By integrating technical excellence with real-world implementation and democratic oversight, ai@cam is pioneering a new model for AI development that ensures technology is deeply connected to public value.

Summary

ai@cam is Cambridge's mission to ensure AI serves science, citizens, and society.

By connecting the University's world-leading research with real-world challenges - from local government to global sustainable development - we're proving that universities can lead a new wave of AI innovation that delivers benefits where they're needed most.

In our second year, ai@cam has engaged over 3000 people, including researchers across all six Schools of the University; brought together researchers from 58 departments to work on shared projects; generated funding proposals with a value of over £9M; and positioned Cambridge as a trusted voice in national AI policy discussions. Our initiatives are already delivering tangible impact through:



Research with real-world impact:

Our AI-deas incubator has kick-started seven interdisciplinary projects spanning 26 University departments, which are addressing challenges in climate policy, public services, education, mental health, women's health, language equity, and cultural heritage.



Policy influence:

Our Policy Lab has advised nine government departments through a series of five policy briefs and roundtables that have convened over 200 experts from 114 organisations, while our public engagement has created opportunities for over 1200 people to learn more about AI at Cambridge, and to participate in deliberative AI policy development.



Training and skills building

Through the Accelerate Programme for Scientific Discovery, we've trained more than 1500 early career researchers in AI for science, with over 500 more on waiting lists for future courses. Our HPC (High Performance Computing) Pioneer Initiative has onboarded 45 projects from 20 departments to Cambridge's Dawn supercomputing system, creating an essential bridge between infrastructure and research innovation.



Global leadership:

Through the International Computation and AI Network (ICAIN), ai@cam has supported three impactful pilot projects addressing sustainable development challenges, including critical issues in weather forecasting for smallholder farmers in Africa, early plant disease detection for food security, and ethical humanitarian action. Our selection as an inaugural node in the European Leadership in Innovation with AI and Science (ELIAS) Alliance connects Cambridge to innovation hubs across eight European cities, creating an international coalition for skills building in AI for science and entrepreneurship.

In the next year we will scale our impact by:



Expanding our AI-deas incubator to support innovation sprints that deploy promising AI-enabled solutions in response to real-world problems, and continuing our programme of support for AI for science and entrepreneurship;



Developing our Policy Insight briefing series and Local Government AI Accelerator to support the deployment of AI in public service, integrating public engagement across this work; and



Advancing our vision for transformative investment in Cambridge's AI capabilities.





01

SECTION

Cambridge's vision for AI innovation

Bridging the gap between AI's promise and beneficial real-world impact

Despite impressive technological breakthroughs, a persistent implementation gap separates AI's capabilities from public value.

AI development is at a crossroads. Despite impressive technological breakthroughs, a persistent implementation gap separates AI's capabilities from public value. Research often happens in silos, communities affected by AI have little voice in its development, and the infrastructure needed to translate technological advances into practical solutions is missing. This adoption gap limits our ability to translate AI's potential into practical solutions to societal challenges and commercial potential to economic growth. Universities are uniquely positioned to reshape this trajectory, serving as crucibles where technical innovation meets societal needs.



A new vision for AI innovation and a new model for implementation

ai@cam accelerates
AI research, policy, and
practice, acting as an
incubator for AI innovation
focused on public value.

Our innovation model creates a continuous cycle we call the 'innovation flywheel': we identify real-world challenges through public dialogue and practitioner engagement, bring together researchers to develop solutions, test these with partners, and feed lessons back into policy - with each step accelerating the next. This echoes Cambridge's tradition of transformative innovation - from Maxwell's Cavendish Laboratory to modern genomics - where breakthroughs emerge from combining theoretical insight with practical implementation. For the University, this provides a mechanism to amplify our collective impact while preserving academic freedom, enabling researchers to pursue innovative ideas in an environment that connects their expertise to society's most pressing needs.

The impacts emerging from our work demonstrate the merits of this approach. Activities catalysed by ai@cam are pioneering next-generation AI methods and embedding democratic engagement in technology development through dialogue between publics, researchers, and policymakers. From accelerating conservation research to helping local authorities adopt AI in public services, ai@cam's projects are delivering real-world benefits and establishing a model for how AI can serve society.

Adapting to a dynamic AI landscape

When ai@cam was established in 2023, our focus was building the University's AI capabilities through enhanced interdisciplinary collaboration. Since then, the AI landscape has transformed dramatically.

Waves of progress in AI - including recent advances in generative AI - are transforming research methods across disciplines and disrupting traditional educational approaches, creating both opportunities and complex challenges for universities worldwide.

While our core mission - creating AI that serves science, citizens, and society - remains unchanged, we're adapting our approach to these evolving conditions:



Accelerating implementation cycles:

Our shift from two-year research programmes to 6-month innovation sprints in our next phase of AI-deas incubator activities reflects the increased pace of AI development, allowing research teams to rapidly progress from concept to application while maintaining academic rigor.



Expanding our community focus:

Initially centred on the research community, we've broadened engagement to support the wider University ecosystem. Our AI for University Operations initiative, which has attracted interest from over 200 Professional Services staff, shows this evolution, recognising that AI adoption across administrative functions creates opportunities for efficiency that require thoughtful implementation.



Creating diverse pathways to impact:

As the field of partners interested in working with AI changes, we've expanded our impact pathways – from policy engagement and public dialogue to local government partnerships and international collaborations – ensuring Cambridge can contribute meaningfully across the AI ecosystem.

This adaptive approach ensures ai@cam remains responsive to emerging needs while advancing our foundational vision of AI that delivers real-world benefits for science, citizens, and society.

02

SECTION

Our impact: 2024-2025 in numbers

Engagement

58

Departments and Institutes
spanning all 6 Schools involved

200+

Professional Services staff
exploring AI applications

3,000+

Participants across events and activities



1,600+

Researchers engaged



Policy & influence

114

Organisations engaged in policy discussions



5

Policy briefs published



9

Government departments
actively consulting



1,200+

Members of the public in dialogue engaged



Research & Innovation

45



Projects accessing Dawn supercomputing system

7



Interdisciplinary
research programmes

14



External partnerships
established

15



Research
publications

£300K+

Funding catalysed

£9M+

In funding applications in progress

Education & skills

500+



Researchers on waiting
lists for training
programmes

1,500+



Researchers trained
in AI methods



03

SECTION

From vision to
action: Cambridge's
innovation flywheel
in action



An end to end vision for AI innovation

Identifying Challenges

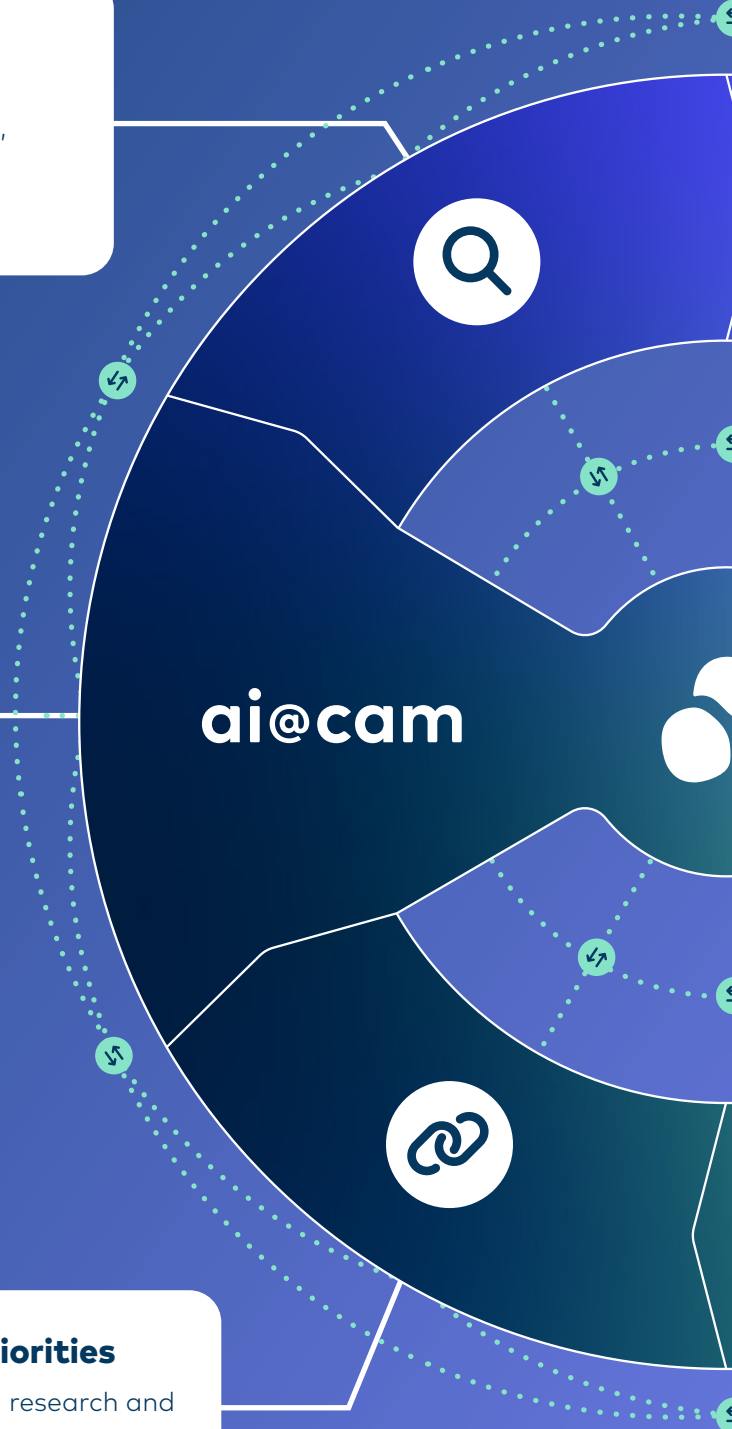
Through public dialogues and partnerships with organisations facing practical problems, we identify opportunities where AI can make beneficial contributions.

Strategic Coordination

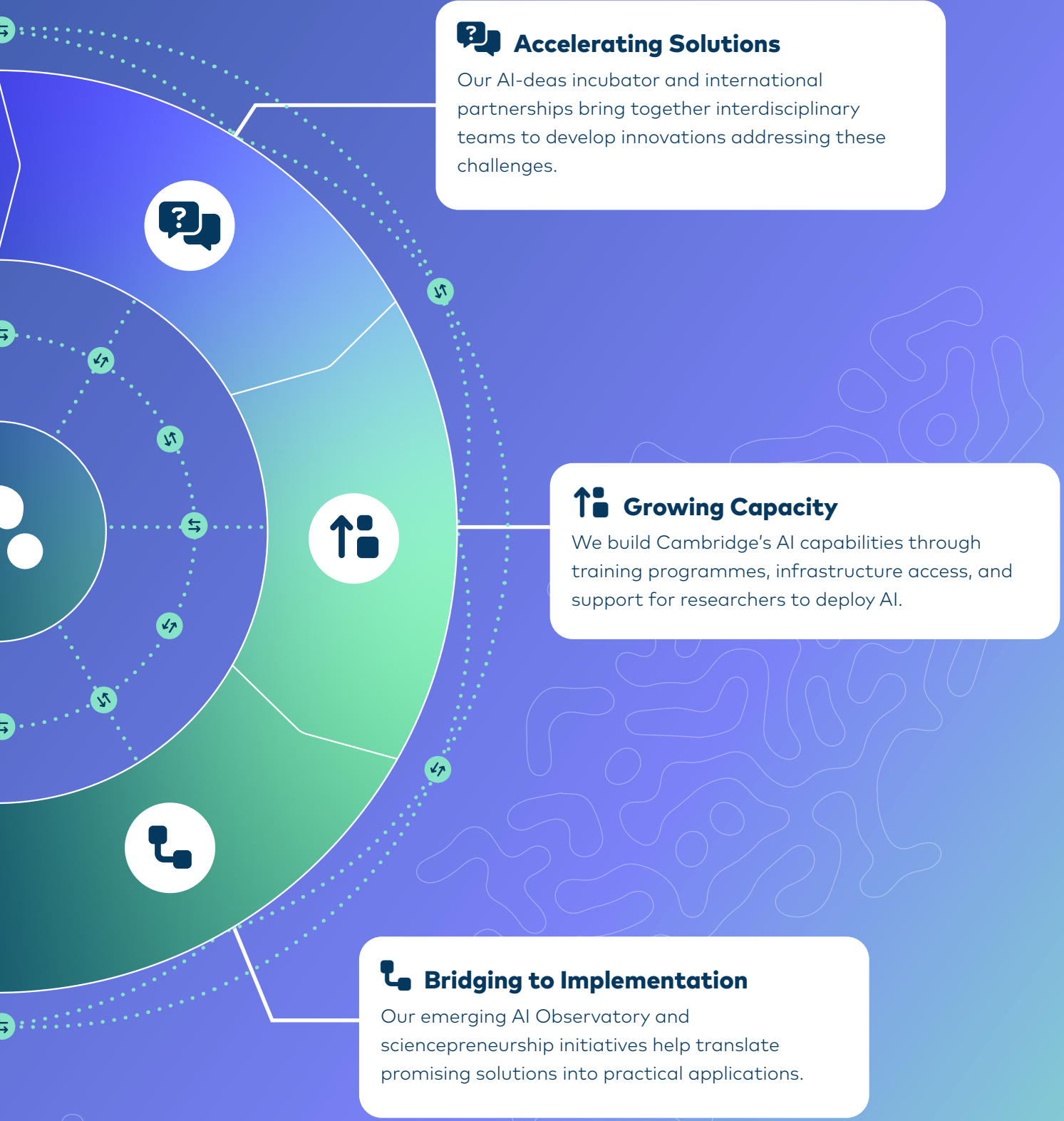
ai@cam provides connective tissue that supports the University AI community, through strategic coordination, partnership and infrastructure development, and long-term capability building.

Connecting to Policy Priorities

Our Policy Lab ensures insights from research and implementation inform policy development and connect to national strategic objectives.



Our innovation model creates a continuous cycle translating research excellence into societal benefit:



Our achievements in 2024-25

ai@cam creates an innovation cycle that connects research excellence with societal benefit. We identify challenges, develop interdisciplinary solutions, build technical capabilities to deliver them, bridge to implementation in real-world use cases, and connect to national priorities. This integrated approach demonstrates how universities can lead the development of AI that truly serves science, citizens, and society.

Identifying real-world challenges

We work with communities and organisations to understand where AI can help tackle pressing problems.



Public dialogues that bring community voices closer to AI research and policy:

// People are the key part of this, it is a decision that affects people, so it is important that they are involved in the decisions from day one."

- Public dialogue participant, AI and the Missions for Government

ai@cam has pioneered engagement that connects experts and publics. Our activities have engaged over 1,200 people across the UK. Our policy brief on 'Public Views on AI and the Missions for Government' translated dialogue findings into actionable policy recommendations, while AI-deas teams have benefitted from hearing public perspectives through the Hopes and Fears Lab, delivered in collaboration with the Kavli Centre for Ethics, Science, and the Public.



▲ [Public dialogues, Cambridge \(September 2024\)](#)



Collaborations with local authorities to support safe and effective use of AI in public services:

Working with ai@cam over the last year has been invaluable. They have collaborated directly with our frontline teams to identify issues and opportunities in which practical AI applications could deliver real public value."

- Liz Watts, Chief Executive,
South Cambridgeshire
District Council



▲ Cambridge Festival, The Hopes and Fears Lab (April 2025)

ai@cam has established a growing network of local authority collaborators across Cambridgeshire, the South East, and North West. At a time of heightened Government interest in the use of AI to improve productivity and public service delivery, these collaborations show that the University can play a leading role in delivering AI innovations with public value. ai@cam has supported frontline officials from over a dozen local authorities to share experiences of using AI, to identify shared challenges in deploying AI for service delivery, and to explore models of University-government collaboration. Building on this foundation, in Summer 2025 ai@cam will launch a collaborative prototyping scheme supporting University-local authority collaborations to develop and test AI solutions for public service challenges.



▲ Greater Manchester Combined Authority AI in Local Government Show and Tell event (May 2025)

These insights inform how we bring together research teams to develop solutions that address the challenges communities and organisations face.



Establishing our AI-deas incubator for challenge-led research:

“ AI-deas funding has been of great support to accelerate our research by fostering connections among like-minded researchers across the University, working in different departments and institutions. This collaborative environment has enabled the exchange of ideas and perspectives that would not have been possible otherwise.”

- Dr Matt Davis,
EQUILL-AI lead, MRC
Cognition and Brain
Sciences Unit



(Right) Electroencephalography sensors measuring electrical activity in the brain. Image courtesy of Zoe Kourtzi, Adaptive Brain Lab, Dept of Psychology

Our flagship AI-deas initiative has evolved from concept to implementation, launching seven interdisciplinary research challenges that bring together 88 researchers from 26 departments and 14 external partnerships and engagements. The initial cohort of AI-deas demonstrates how this approach accelerates progress from concept to application, generating collaborative publications, attracting follow-on funding, and establishing partnerships with end-users. Their areas of work span healthcare, climate policy, women's health, education, inclusive language technologies, cultural heritage, and local government.

Early impacts include:

- **AI for Climate and Nature:** Developed an innovative 'living evidence synthesis pipeline' designed to transform how policymakers access conservation research. Early feedback indicates promising potential for adoption in policy workflows.
- **Ethically Rooted Decision-Making with AI in Connected Cities:** Conducted two workshops with local authority representatives to understand motivations and challenges surrounding use of AI in public services. Currently engaging with Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Services to assess ethical aspects of deploying AI in summarisation of public responses to planning consultations.
- **Responsible AI for Better Lifelong Brain and Mental Health:** Developed AI tools helping clinicians predict, diagnose, and treat brain diseases and mental health disorders. Their AI tool outperformed traditional clinical tests in predicting Alzheimer's progression, and rescued a failed clinical trial with significant implications for drug discovery and healthcare delivery.

AI-deas projects have catalysed:

10+

Over 10 research publications

£200K+

Over £200,000 of external research funding, with open applications worth over £9M

14

14 external partnerships, with local authorities, hospitals, universities and industry.





Internationalising our impact through the International Computation and AI Network (ICAIN):

ai@cam's strategic partnership with Data Science Africa, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, ETH Zurich and its Swiss National Supercomputing Centre, EPFL, Finnish Supercomputing Centre and ELLIS has launched a cohort of pilot projects addressing sustainable development challenges. Three pilot projects are now underway, focusing on improved weather prediction for sustainable agriculture, early diagnosis of plant diseases, and ethical AI for humanitarian action. In November, ai@cam hosted 32 international representatives in Cambridge, positioning the University at the centre of global dialogue on open research infrastructure for AI. This initiative has generated over £135,000 in external funding to expand its pilot projects, creating pathways for continued international engagement.



ICAIN launch event at Davos
(January 2025)

To maximise impact, these innovations require robust technical foundations and expanded capacity across the University's AI community.

↑ Growing Cambridge's innovation capacity

We expand the University's ability to undertake AI research through training, infrastructure, and international partnerships.



Bridging University research and infrastructure through HPC Pioneer Projects:

The Dawn supercomputer is a strategic asset for Cambridge's AI community. ai@cam supports the Dawn team in engaging researchers, ensuring this significant infrastructure investment translates into tangible research outcomes. Working with Research Computing Services, the Cambridge Open Zettascale Lab, and the Centre for Data Driven Discovery, ai@cam's HPC Pioneer Project Initiative onboarded 45 projects from 20 Departments to Dawn over the last year. This work helps tailor Dawn's operations to AI and simulation community needs and inform support service design. Moving quickly to bring scientific projects onto Dawn has enhanced Cambridge's credibility in national computing strategy discussions. This position was reinforced when the Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology's HPC team visited Cambridge in September 2024 to review our implementation approach.



I was fortunate to take part in the first Accelerate

Programme Study Group on LLMs with a highly interdisciplinary cohort. Learning from this group and receiving subsequent tailored support from Accelerate team members has unlocked incredible new realities for my PhD and career. A year later I'm teaching and lecturing in my own field on several of the methods I first learnt from Accelerate, proving the nuclear reaction effect of their work."

- Feedback from Jacob Forward, PhD student, Faculty of History



Equipping a generation of researchers in AI skills:

Building on this technical infrastructure, we've focused on human capacity. Through the Accelerate Programme for Scientific Discovery, we've developed a vibrant community of over 2500 researchers working at the intersection of AI and science. The programme has trained more than 1500 early career researchers in AI through a comprehensive pathway that guides participants from basic programming foundations to advanced AI deployment. With over 500 researchers on waiting lists for training programmes, we're demonstrating urgent need for AI capacity-building in science while establishing an effective delivery model.



▲ Accelerate Programme for Scientific Discovery AI and Large Language Models workshop (April 2025)

With strong capabilities in place, we create pathways to real-world deployment that translate promising research into practical applications.

Bridging to implementation

We create pathways for promising research to reach real-world applications.



Creating the conditions to spin up an AI Observatory:

Building on our external engagements, ai@cam's AI Observatory will create a collaborative programme where University researchers work directly with industry and public sector partners to test AI solutions on real problems. We will bring together teams to support this work, creating an environment where academic insights meet practical implementation challenges.



ai@cam provides an important bridge between the University and Cambridgeshire AI community, showing how the University is an active partner with industry and the public sector in driving AI development."

- Kathryn Chapman, Executive Director, Innovate Cambridge





Translating innovations to real-world impact through sciencepreneurship:

ai@cam has been selected as an inaugural member of the European Leadership in Innovation with AI and Science (ELIAS) Alliance, connecting our community to innovation hubs across Europe, including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Munich, Potsdam, Tübingen, and Zurich. This partnership will boost entrepreneurial activity in AI and create opportunities for students to build skills in AI for science and entrepreneurship. Our first engagement from this initiative is a skills-building workshop in AI for science and entrepreneurship in Summer 2025 that provided 30 early career researchers with technical training in AI for science and an introduction to entrepreneurship.

This implementation experience generates insights that feed directly into policy development, completing our innovation cycle.

Connecting to policy priorities

We connect policymakers to expert communities and bring interdisciplinary research insights to national policy conversations.



Connecting Cambridge expertise to national policy debates:

At a time of intense interest from policymakers in AI, it's crucial that universities step up to show how we can innovate for public benefit. ai@cam is demonstrating exactly how this can be done - connecting rigorous research with the policy challenges that matter most to society and local communities."

- Saul Klein, Co-founder and Managing Director, Phoenix Court



▲ Open source AI Infrastructure Ecosystem panel session, AI House, Davos, with Hannah Brahme (Managing Director, AI House), Bill Jia (VP Engineering, Google), Yann LeCun (VP & Chief AI Scientist, Meta) and Neil Lawrence (DeepMind Professor of Machine Learning, University of Cambridge) (January 2025)

Our Policy Lab has established itself as a trusted source of expertise informing AI policy development. Working with the Bennett School for Public Policy and Minderoo Centre for Technology and Democracy, we have published five policy briefs on topics including generative AI, intellectual property, and national AI strategy, engaging nine government departments. These insights draw from workshops convening over 200 expert participants from 114 academic departments, companies, civil society organisations, and Government in responsive roundtables. These activities connect policymakers to experts on live policy issues, positioning Cambridge to contribute to national conversations about responsible AI adoption.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, ai@cam positioned Cambridge at the forefront of international dialogue on AI governance and global collaboration, contributing to high-profile panel sessions and roundtables spanning research, industry, and policy communities. This engagement facilitated conversations with leaders from philanthropy, technology companies, and government about deploying AI for public benefit. They also supported the successful launch of ICAIN's annual report, including securing funding commitments for climate and agriculture projects.

How we work: ai@cam's strategic functions

ai@cam provides services that help the whole AI community, creating connective tissue that translates Cambridge's intellectual capital into technological and social innovations.



Strategic coordination

ai@cam provides a contact point for external partners; instead of partners having to navigate multiple departments, we connect them with researchers and help coordinate collaborative projects. For example, in Spring 2025 we led the development of the 'Cambridge Can bring AI to life' statement – based on input from over 50 organisations – showcasing Cambridge's AI capabilities at a time when the region is hoping to capitalise on investment opportunities from Government. Within the University, ai@cam is bringing together partners to develop a vision for a shared physical hub for core machine learning and AI technical teams across departments.



External connectivity

ai@cam is helping position Cambridge as a thought leader in innovative and responsible AI. Our Cambridge Festival events engaged over 1,200 members of our local communities, and our activities have attracted researchers from 58 departments across all Schools. ai@cam collaborated with the Central Communications team to spotlight innovative AI research from across the University as part of its AI Campaign. This effort resulted in a new content bank of thought leadership pieces, videos, and news features, which have collectively garnered over 10,000 views. Additionally, ai@cam supported the Public Affairs team in hosting two ministerial visits.



Capability building

Recognising the opportunity that new AI tools offer to support administrative efficiency across the University, in Spring 2025 ai@cam launched AI for University Ops – an incubator for Professional Services Staff to use AI in their business functions. This initiative generated over 200 expressions of interest from Professional Services Staff and is creating a community of practice that is supporting administrative teams to explore how AI could enhance University operations efficiency and productivity.



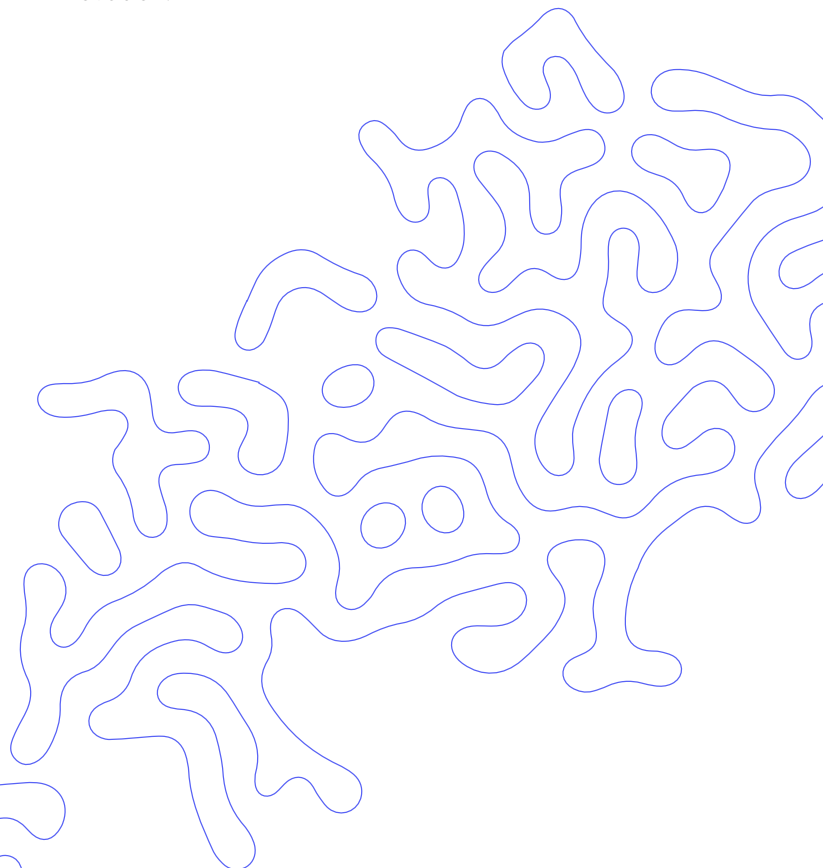
Long-term capability building

Drawing together insights from our successful pilot projects – and bringing together diverse views from across all Schools – ai@cam has led the creation of a vision for transformative investment in AI at the University. We are actively working with Cambridge University Development and Alumni Relations (CUDAR) to engage strategic partners to deliver this vision, which would allow the University of Cambridge to lead the next wave of AI innovation.



Infrastructure

The HPC Pioneer Projects scheme demonstrates our approach to expanding access to critical infrastructure. By coordinating this initiative in partnership with Research Computing Services, ai@cam has helped establish processes that enable researchers from across the University to access and use HPC resources.





04

SECTION

Looking forward: Our next phase

Kick-starting the innovation flywheel

At a critical inflection point in AI development, the gap between technological potential and societal benefit remains a pressing challenge. For the University, this creates both an opportunity and an imperative: to leverage our intellectual capital to lead a new model of AI innovation focused on public benefit, while preparing our institution to

thrive in an increasingly AI-shaped academic landscape.

ai@cam is positioned to address these challenges through our strategic interventions to build the University's AI capabilities.

Our approach has already demonstrated impact through:



Challenge-led research that harnesses Cambridge's interdisciplinary strengths to tackle complex societal problems.

Our AI-deas initiative has successfully launched seven research challenges spanning 26 departments, creating a vibrant community of 88 researchers collaboratively developing solutions with tangible outcomes. These projects have generated significant research outputs and secured competitive funding, with over £9 million in grant applications under consideration at time of writing (May 2025).



Implementation partnerships that translate research insights into practical applications.

Our collaborations with local authorities are demonstrating AI's potential to enhance public services and address community needs. Meanwhile, our emerging AI Observatory concept has attracted interest from companies seeking to participate in a pre-competitive space where academic expertise and industry implementation challenges can converge to develop responsible AI solutions.



Policy engagement that puts the University in the centre of national conversations about the future of AI.

Our Policy Lab has established itself as a trusted source of expertise informing AI policy development, publishing five policy briefs on topics from generative AI to national AI strategy with engagement across nine government departments.



AI capability building that expands the community of researchers and professionals able to leverage AI effectively.

Through the Accelerate Programme for Scientific Discovery, we've trained over 1,500 researchers across disciplines in AI methodologies, while our AI for University Operations initiative has engaged more than 200 Professional Services staff in exploring how AI can enhance administrative efficiency.



Strategic vision development that aligns Cambridge's AI activities toward long-term leadership.

Working across all Schools, we've crafted a compelling vision for transformative investment in AI at Cambridge, engaging through CUDAR to secure the resources needed to establish Cambridge as a global leader in responsible AI innovation.

These strands are complementary elements of an integrated strategy that creates a continuous cycle of innovation centred on public benefit.



Looking forward: Building on our foundation

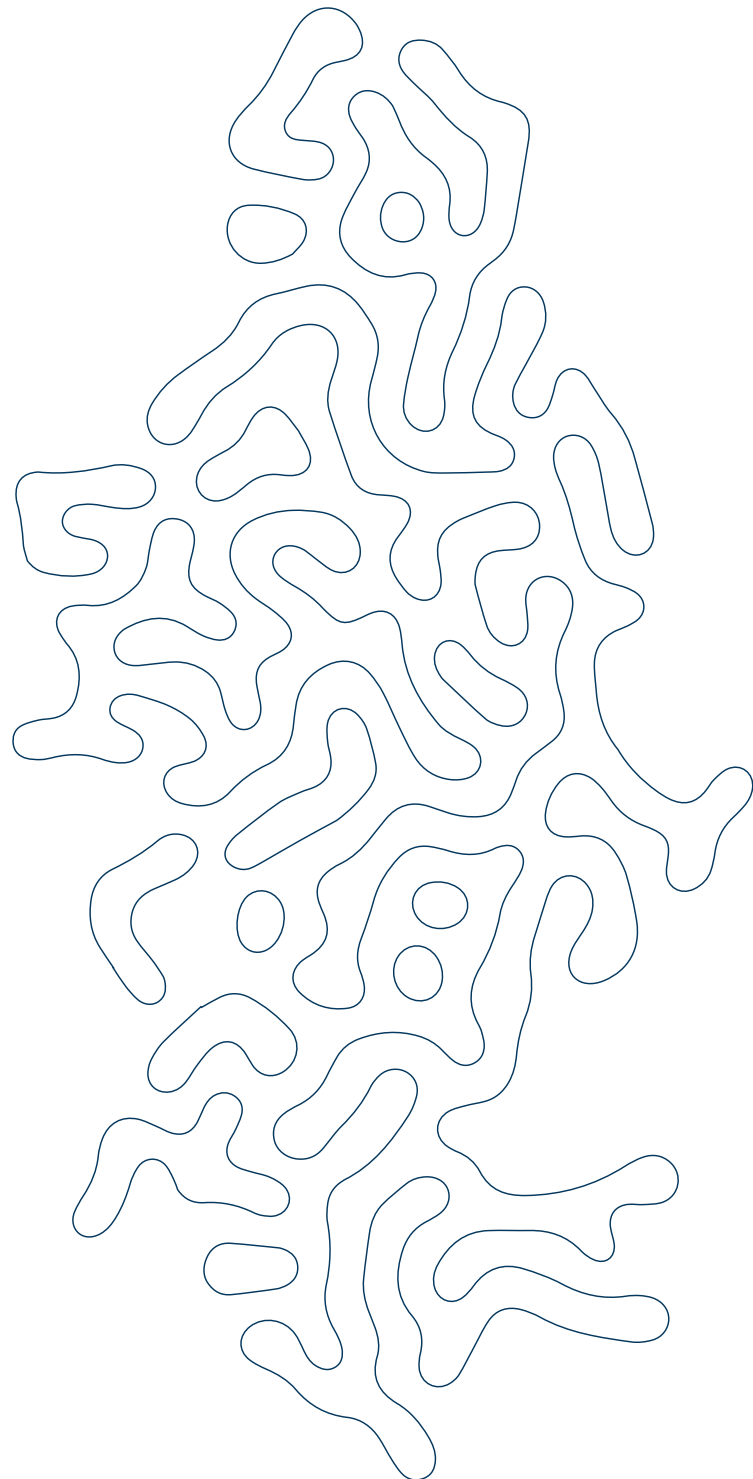
Building on this foundation, our priorities for the coming year will include:

Scaling our challenge-led research incubator to create a sprint-based innovation programme

In our next phase of operations, ai@cam will expand our AI-deas portfolio with a new sprint-based innovation model that accelerates implementation of promising solutions. This pivot to rapid development cycles responds directly to the accelerated pace of AI development we've witnessed since our founding. Our AI-deas Sprint programme will implement 6-month rapid development cycles. These focused projects with clear pathways to implementation and commercial potential will help researchers stay at the forefront of AI innovation.

Bridging research and real-world implementation with the launch of our AI Observatory

The AI Observatory will create a collaborative environment where academic expertise meets practical implementation challenges in industry and the public sector. At least five focused projects – depending on appetite from partners and the research community – will prototype solutions to critical challenges. These projects will lay the groundwork for larger-scale pre-competitive research collaborations with external partners. This approach provides a testbed for evaluating AI solutions against real-world constraints while building the evidence base for responsible deployment.



Shaping the national AI agenda with our new policy briefing series and Local Government AI Innovation Programme

Our Policy Insight series will produce targeted briefings on emerging governance questions while creating knowledge exchange forums that respond to policy needs. The Local Government AI Accelerator will support collaborative prototyping of AI-enabled solutions to public services challenges, develop scalable use cases, and create a forum for knowledge sharing across local government and University partners.

Creating a broader conversation about AI with a structured public dialogue programme

ai@cam's AI dialogues will grow to establish a more structured programme of public engagement activities, creating opportunities for communities to shape AI development. This expanded programme will bring diverse voices together to help shape research and policy priorities.

Supporting the next generation of researchers and entrepreneurs in AI for science

ai@cam will continue to support AI for science training via the Accelerate Programme for Scientific Discovery, and will build its portfolio of AI sciencepreneurship activities with the ELIAS Alliance.

Progressing a long-term vision for AI at Cambridge

ai@cam will advance our vision for a step-change in Cambridge's AI capabilities, working with CUDAR to secure resources by presenting our investment case for transformative funding that establishes Cambridge as the global centre for AI that serves science, citizens, and society. We will continue to convene strategic projects that enhance the University's AI capabilities.

Our work is reshaping AI development:



From siloed research to challenge-driven collaboration that mobilised expertise across disciplines;



Combining innovative theoretical exploration with practical implementation delivering tangible benefits;

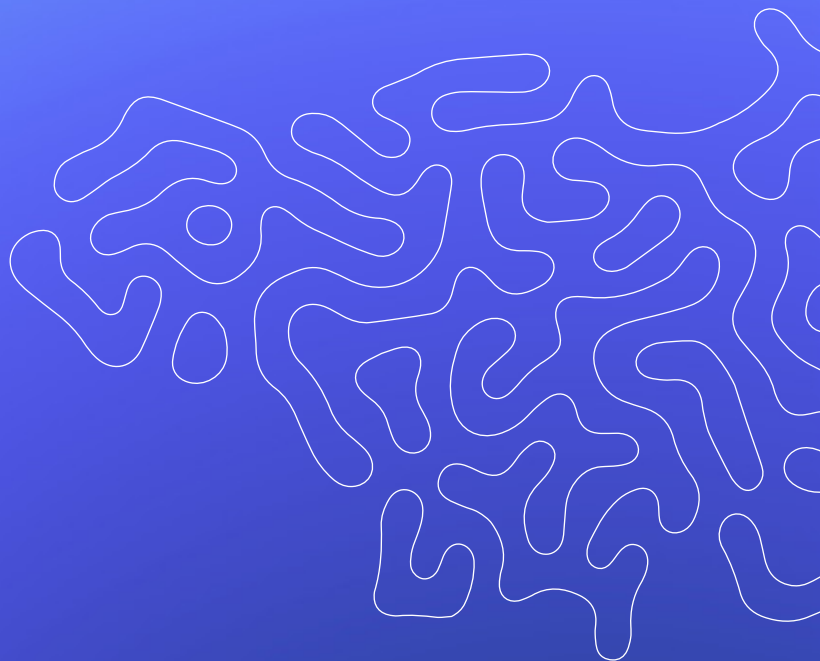


In an environment of responsible innovation centring societal needs;



With support connecting academic outputs to societal impact.

This transformative vision positions Cambridge at the forefront of the next wave of AI innovation - advancing technical capabilities while reshaping our relationship with AI to create a future where AI truly serves science, citizens, and society.



05

SECTION

Annex

Annex 1: Steering group and core team



John Aston

Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research, Harding Professor of Statistics in Public Life, Department of Pure Mathematics



Colm-cille Caulfield

Professor of Environmental and Industrial Fluid Dynamics, Head of the Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics, and co-Chair, C2D3



Diane Coyle

Bennett Professor of Public Policy and Research Director, Bennett School of Public Policy



Mireia Crispin

Assistant Professor, Integrated Cancer Medicine, Department of Oncology



Neil Lawrence

DeepMind Professor of Machine Learning, Department of Computer Science and Technology



Simon Godsill

Professor of Statistical Signal Processing, Department of Engineering



Tim Minshall

Dr John C Taylor Professor of Innovation, Institute for Manufacturing



Richard McMahon

Professor of Astronomy, Institute of Astronomy



Gina Neff

Executive Director, the Minderoo Centre for Technology & Democracy



Jessica Montgomery

Director, ai@cam



Richard Turner

Professor of Machine Learning, Department of Engineering



Carola-Bibiane Schönlieb

Professor of Applied Mathematics, Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics



Elinor Pegler

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