

Researchers of CDBB

More than 220 academics from 15 universities working on 68 discrete projects.



Licence to explore

The CDBB research programme may not be a unique enterprise, but it is certainly rare. Starting from scratch, CDBB commissioned an initial set of short studies to scope out the potential breadth of its activity. As a result, it took on projects that had started elsewhere and gave them room to grow. It also established a bridgehead between different research endeavours.

When the research programme launched, it had two main characteristics. First, more than half the projects were led and supported by early career researchers – a strong signal that CDBB was laying foundations for the long term.

Second, it covered a wide range of topics and disciplines. In fact, there’s probably no subject studied at Cambridge that couldn’t, in principle, be folded into some or other research activity. Obviously, it incorporated architecture, engineering, maths and statistics. But also linguistics (for example, how to classify terms for mutual understanding) and philosophy (such as the ethical implications of artificial intelligence). It was a real joy when disparate disciplines came together across the ‘divide’, for example, to produce Four Futures, One Choice.

In the same spirit, communications and engagement specialists translated academic papers into social media posts, blogs and videos. They also built a knowledge base navigator to help people investigate further.

Because CDBB’s mission was so far-reaching, researchers had considerable freedom. There were many exciting opportunities to get out into the field, for example, the Unfolding Pavilion, the Staffordshire bridge project and Satellite infrastructure monitoring. The outputs from all of these are still cascading out.

There was also a remarkable level of engagement from external stakeholders. One project is developing a digital twin of the ultra-modern buildings in the University’s West Cambridge campus. The primary stakeholders here are the estate managers and building operators, who are trying to optimise the working environment for their occupants. This was a great reminder to the researchers that they are all part of a bigger effort that is making a real difference on the ground.



Andrew Smith,
Research Programme
Manager, CDBB

Andrew is research programme manager in the core team at the CDBB. He is responsible for operational management of the research bridgehead, including the delivery of research outputs from the funded programmes, and supports the bridgehead’s strategic direction. Before joining CDBB, he was business/project manager of multi-disciplinary EU- and UKRI-funded consortia and centres hosted by UK HEIs at Sheffield, Glasgow and Edinburgh universities. Andrew spent 11 years in New Zealand, at an economics, engineering and environmental consultancy, as corporate planner at a city council, and as a strategy adviser at a Crown Research Institute. He has a degree in economics from Cambridge University.