

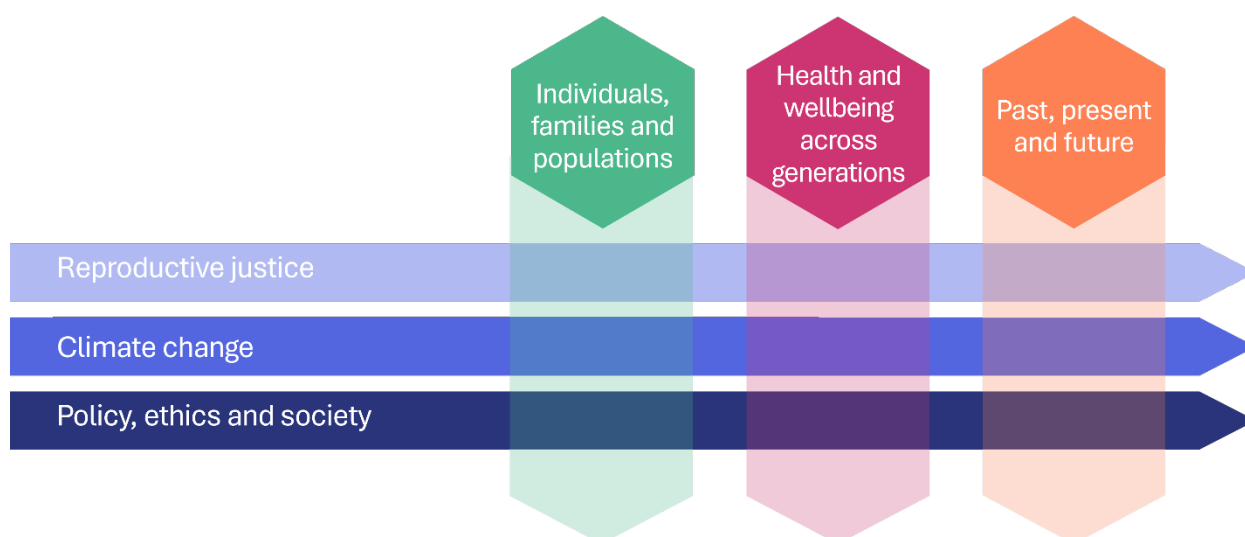
Research theme framework: consultation and adoption

Proposal

In March 2025, we shared a proposal to introduce a research theme framework, as a way of bringing together and organising our membership. We hoped that this framework would:

- enable members to shape Cambridge Reproduction’s strategic priorities at a grassroots level;
- stimulate new, cross-disciplinary collaborations and funding applications;
- bring researchers together to create impact and engagement outside academia;
- intersect with our funding schemes, events and other activities.

The proposed framework is for three broad thematic areas that intersect with three cross-cutting contextual challenges:



The full proposal is available [on our website](#).

Consultation

Cambridge Reproduction members were invited to give feedback on the proposed framework throughout March, April and May 2025. We received feedback from 31 people, approximately 12% of the total membership. The respondents were broadly representative of the wider network, with some under-representation of researchers in the School of Clinical Medicine and postdoctoral researchers. We feel that the length of the consultation period, as well as the number and range of respondents, is sufficient to give us a mandate to adopt our original proposal, with small modifications.

Respondents were strongly supportive of research themes in principle, identifying them as an effective way to catalyse cross-disciplinary collaboration and funding applications and to develop impact outside academia. Some respondents cited additional benefits such as giving the IRC a clearer identity, raising external profile and helping to shape the broader Cambridge research agenda.

Some raised concerns about how to ensure that research themes (in general) are effective. These included concerns about scope (neither too broad and unfocused, nor too narrow and exclusive), inclusivity (ensuring that research that does not fit easily within a particular theme is still valued and represented within the network), artificial constraints on research agendas and duplication of activity happening elsewhere in the University. We have taken careful account of these concerns and will work closely with the theme leads to ensure that our framework is as effective and inclusive as possible.

The proposed research theme framework was generally well received, with each element attracting a majority of respondents who said that they felt it aligned with their own research. 28 out of 31 respondents (90%) said that they were “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to participate in this framework. There was no strong feeling against any of the proposed framework elements, or in favour of an alternative element.

We are very grateful to everybody who responded to this consultation, and who shared their opinions so thoughtfully and constructively. As a result of the questionnaire, we have identified a number of cross-disciplinary questions or challenges that members would like to see Cambridge Reproduction address. These range from fundamental questions about reproduction itself (why is reproduction important? How can we think about wider cultures of reproduction beyond the purely biological?) and ways to view contemporary reproductive changes and inequities through an intersectional lens, to urgent social challenges such as AI, climate change, political turbulence and public trust. We hope to take forward some of these suggestions over the next few years.

The proposed research theme framework will be adopted by Cambridge Reproduction from 1 October 2025. The sections below describe how it will operate and a timetable for implementation. This framework will be reviewed at the end of the first year and may evolve or change as a result. We continue to welcome suggestions from the membership for new thematic foci and for cross-disciplinary activities inside or outside the framework.

Some researchers may feel that their interests lie partly (or even wholly) outside the Cambridge Reproduction research theme framework. We recognise the value of those areas of research as well, and will continue to support a range of cross-disciplinary activities that are not encompassed by the framework. We hope that adoption of this framework will catalyse *additional* cross-disciplinary collaboration in a few strategically-important areas, rather than reduce or replace the rich variety of interests and interactions that are currently represented in our network.

Operation of the research theme framework

Thematic areas

Each of the three thematic areas (Individuals, families and populations; Health and wellbeing across generations; Past, present and future) will be led by 2–4 theme leads, who will be responsible for developing a vision and activities relating to that theme. Theme leads will serve a 2-year term in the first instance. Members may apply to become a theme lead as an individual or in a group of up to 4 people. Any member of Cambridge Reproduction may apply to become a theme lead, but it is expected that the leadership for each thematic area will include:

- at least two mid-career or senior researchers;
- researchers from at least two different Schools or Institutes.

Each thematic area will receive a budget of £5,000 for the academic year 2025–26. This budget may be spent in any way that they feel will best advance the theme (e.g. cross-disciplinary events, specific projects, research assistants). Budgets and proposed activities must be agreed in advance with the Chairs and Programme Manager. This will ensure that we have sufficient administrative capacity to

support these activities adequately, and that there is no overlap with the rest of the Cambridge Reproduction programme.

Theme leads are encouraged to consider how their proposals may intersect with the wider Cambridge Reproduction programme, including the funding schemes, events (Cambridge Reproduction Forum, Cambridge Reading Group on Reproduction and Cambridge Festival) and networks (ECR Committee and other connected groups). Their proposed activities should be broadly cross-disciplinary, and should engage members at all levels, including postgraduate (especially PhD) students.

Members will be invited to join and contribute to one or more themes. Each theme will have a section on the Cambridge Reproduction website.

Cross-cutting challenges

In addition to the three thematic areas, our research themes framework identifies three cross-cutting challenges: Reproductive justice; Climate change; and Policy, ethics and society. These challenges provide a broader context for thinking about reproduction, as well as potentially intersecting with each thematic area to produce more focused questions (e.g. about how climate change impacts on intergenerational health, or how we can develop policy to meet the challenges posed by future reproductive technologies).

We will recruit a lead for each of these cross-cutting challenges, to work with the theme leads and with the Cambridge Reproduction Steering Committee and Executive Committee to ensure that these contextual challenges are embedded throughout the Cambridge Reproduction programme. Challenge leads will be appointed for 2 years in the first instance.

Timeline

23 June 2025	Results of consultation and final research theme framework proposal shared with the Cambridge Reproduction membership; call for theme leads
18 July 2025	Deadline for expressions of interest for theme leads and challenge leads
1 September 2025	Theme leads and challenge leads announced and members invited to join
early October 2025	Theme groups meet to discuss ideas and make plans
22 October 2025	Themes introduced at the Cambridge Reproduction Forum

If you have any questions about the introduction of the research theme framework, or if you would like to discuss the possibility of becoming involved, please contact Christina Rozeik (coordinator@repro.cam.ac.uk).

Christina Rozeik

13 June 2025