

## RESEARCH CULTURE WEDNESDAY LUNCH TIME SEMINAR

---

The department proudly hosted its first Research Culture Wednesday Lunchtime Seminar (WLTS), featuring a timely topic: **“Collaboration Across Scales”**. We were joined by our very own PhD student, Julia Beker, and Professor Duncan Astle, who shared their experiences of local and international collaborations.

After recently hearing Prof Adrian Liston speak about positive research culture, his words still resonated with me: “Science makes progress through the cumulative impact of teams”. I was keen to hear how our colleagues at CBU put this into practice.



### COLLABORATION WITHIN AN INTERNATIONAL TEAM: JULIA BEKER

Julia’s research focuses on memory deficits in Dissociative Identity Disorder, a rare but significantly impairing psychiatric condition. From the start of her PhD with Prof Michael Anderson, she recognised that building a strong network would be key to her work.

Her collaborations extend internationally, including partnerships with the McLean Hospital team in Boston, which provides opportunities to ask questions and engage with a lived experience panel. Locally and nationally, Julia works with the Clinic for Dissociative Studies (CDS UK), the charity Dissociative Disorders Alliance, and DIS.connected, an international network of early-career researchers studying dissociative experiences. She is also connected to the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation.

Listening to Julia's incredible achievement in bringing such a broad collaboration together, I couldn't help but admire the often silent and unrecognised work involved in research projects. Julia shared practical tips for managing such collaborations: maintaining 1:1 meetings with team members, ensuring information is clearly shared, and directing specific issues to a single person for efficiency before updating the wider group. Despite the challenges of wearing multiple hats in a small core team, Julia emphasised the value of interdisciplinary support in shaping her research. Without a doubt, she demonstrated that even at the PhD level, it is possible to build and contribute to successful international collaborations.

## COLLABORATION IN LARGE TEAMS AND CONSORTIA: PROF DUNCAN ASTLE

Prof Astle followed with insights from his experience leading both a large research group, the 4D Lab, and consortium projects such as CALM and ANXIOMICS. With lab meetings attended by around 15 people, Prof Astle kindly gave a glimpse of what it is like to be part of the 4D lab. The lab offers a structured environment with weekly 1:1s, lab meetings, journal clubs, special interest groups, grant workshop half-days, Christmas celebrations, and termly lunches. Biannual lab away days provide opportunities for career discussions, sharing tips, and inviting guest speakers. A large lab like this offers the economies of scale with more resources, intellectual diversity and a broader range of support networks. Yet it also poses challenges, such as balancing the limited time of the principal investigator with the varying needs of team members. As a PhD student myself, it was reassuring to hear Prof Astle debunk the perception that a student's success is solely due to the PI.

In contrast, consortium projects combine multiple labs of varying sizes, offering junior researchers the chance to contribute to large-scale studies. They do, however, require clearly defined roles and responsibilities, as well as project management support, because the demands will fall onto the early career researchers. Early agreements on data storage, access, and authorship guidelines are also key for smooth collaboration.

The first WLTS offered a wealth of practical tips and insights, highlighting how research culture is often implicit. My takeaway was that setting expectations early, maintaining regular communication, and ensuring support systems are available can all help shape successful collaborations.

