

RESEARCH CULTURE WLTS LENT 2026

In the second talk of the Research Culture series, we explored how the cultural diversity around us can offer numerous advantages in creating a more equitable and open research environment. We were joined by Kasia Lanucha, an Intercultural Communication educator, and Professor Caroline Trotter, the Director of Cambridge-Africa, who offered different perspectives on how to effectively leverage cultural diversity in our research. These lectures encouraged us to explore and exchange ideas to improve cross-cultural communication, learning from colleagues across the university. As postgraduate students from various nations and cultures, we were reassured and inspired by this, which demonstrated that there is a place for everyone at the CBU.



NAVIGATING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN RESEARCH: KASIA LANUCHA

Kasia works as an Intercultural Communication Educator at the Department of Engineering and also runs her own consultancy. Drawing on her own multicultural background spanning Poland, Germany, and the UK, she shared practical insights into how we can better recognise cultural diversity in the workplace and use it to our advantage.

She encouraged us to begin with awareness: could the differences we notice in our interactions be shaped by the culture we come from? A simple yet relatable example she offered was email communication. Some of us favour more direct, low-context styles, while others communicate more indirectly, providing greater context and nuance. There were many nods and smiles around the room as Kasia presented sample emails illustrating these contrasting approaches to giving feedback. These subtle differences, she explained, may be culturally driven, and recognising these frameworks can help us interpret one another's intentions more thoughtfully and communicate more effectively.

Kasia also mentioned that team-building opportunities are offered across departments to foster mutual understanding within diverse teams. Additionally, when one needs individual support, there are psychometric tools we can use to understand our communication styles and cultural influences. Kasia concluded by emphasising the many advantages of multicultural teams: diversity fuels innovation, strengthens social and collaborative skills, and, simply put, makes the research environment more dynamic and fun.

CAMBRIDGE-AFRICA: PROFESSOR CAROLINE TROTTER

Following Kasia's experiences and insights, Professor Trotter introduced her as the Director of Cambridge-Africa, emphasising the valuable outcomes of this multinational, cross-cultural collaboration. She outlined the program's goal of establishing equitable partnerships between Cambridge and researchers in the Global South, particularly in Africa. Over the years, the Cambridge-Africa initiative has nurtured, funded, and strengthened relationships across 33 countries, promoting open collaboration within Cambridge and its international network.

The program is not solely driven by the aspirations of Cambridge researchers; it embodies core values of equity, transparency, and trust, empowering African partners to lead research initiatives aligned with their priorities. For instance, Professor Trotter highlighted the ALBORADA research fund, which supports early-career researchers from both Cambridge and sub-Saharan African institutions by pairing them to foster collaboration.



Although nearly four hundred awards have been granted to date and the impact has been significant in terms of satisfaction ratings and research output, Professor Trotter noted that many countries still have yet to establish collaborations through this network. Additionally, notable barriers persist, particularly related to language and terminology, which can be challenging in interdisciplinary projects. She also emphasised the importance of respecting cultural boundaries and the need to balance curiosity with respect when conducting research. Overall, Professor Trotter highlighted the program's major successes, driven by a shared purpose of improving the world.

<https://www.cambridge-africa.cam.ac.uk/>



This second WLTS offered an opportunity to see how we can better communicate across cultural differences, and how this is being done in Cambridge in real time. Our takeaway is that through open, but respectful inquiry, and collaboration, driven by curiosity for learning from and with another, will ultimately ensure that we can provide a more equitable, compassionate and trusting research environment for all involved.