Building a Research Community

Presenters: Elizabeth Adams, Mary Beth Kneafsey, Jennifer Boyle

QAA Focus On: The Postgraduate Research Student Experience
Initial Questions

• Is there a *consensus* around what constitutes a ‘research community’?

• What does a *successful* research community look like?

• What is the *purpose* of a research community?

• Where do/should the *boundaries* of the research community lie?
Consultation Process

- Telephone interviews with 10 members of staff
- Five PGR focus groups (approx. 45 participants in total)
- Telephone interviews with 10 PGRs
Key Points

- Supervisors
- Physical Space
- Building Academic Identity
- PGR Training
- Online Communities
- PGR Representation
- Centralised Communities
Supervisors

- ‘The first port of call’

- Identified by both staff and PGRs as playing a crucial role

- Codes of practice can establish ethos and build a culture of involvement
Physical Space

- ‘It’s not about creating the community – it’s about creating the space for communities’
- Is there variation in terms of the type of space offered?
- Multi-purpose spaces allow for a range of interactions: formal, informal, group working
Building Academic Identity

- ‘Working shoulder-to-shoulder’
- Staff and PGR interaction is vital
- Codes of practice for PGWT can establish the importance of the role and ensure openness to all
PGR Training

• ‘Get outside your own research bubble’

• Opportunity to interact with other PGRs is as valuable as the content of the training itself

• Training should cover the entirety of the PGR experience: issues such as managing mental health, as well as subject-specific skills
Online Communities

• ‘Joined Twitter for academic reasons and found a feeling of community’

• Online communication can play a vital role in the research community

• An active online presence, and offering online space, enables distance and p/t researchers to maintain links with the community
PGR Representation

- ‘Worried that not going to things might make me look invisible’

- How can PGRs make themselves seen and heard?

- Sub communities could be created for underrepresented groups.

- Regular feedback could be sought from all PGRs
Centralised Communities

- ‘Outside the research group’

- Cross institutional organisations, or temporary groups created by a focused activity

- Is there scope for PGRs to create and lead their own centralised communities? Can lessons be learned from how centralised communities unite members?
Questions to Consider

• How can you facilitate the creation/growth of the research community in the 6 areas discussed?
• Feedback from researchers is invaluable: how do you go about obtaining it?
• Research communities are characterised by their diversity. How do you ensure that everyone can be involved?
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