Another event? Another activity? Do doctoral students actually want it?

Oli Schofield FHEA and Peter Duckett
Doctoral College, University of Bath
Doctoral education at Bath

- Approximately 2000 PGRs at Bath
  - 70% PhD students, 30% professional doctorate students

- 3 Faculties and 1 School

- Institutional-wide Doctoral College (established 2017)
  - Doctoral Recruitment & Admissions
  - Doctoral Programmes
  - Doctoral Development and Student Experience

Provide enough opportunities for doctoral students to develop as a researcher, as well as ensure they have the best possible doctoral student experience.
Opportunities for students at Bath

Department arranged activities
- Research seminars
- Staff and student coffee mornings
- Student social and development committees

Institutional-wide activities
- Doctoral College
  - Research-related events, e.g. Writing Wednesdays, 3MT®, Research Showcase
  - Social and wellbeing activities, e.g. Cake in the Commons
  - Doctoral Skills Programme
- Students’ Union
  - Postgraduate Association (PGA)
  - Volunteering projects
- Public Engagement
  - Images of Research
  - Public Engagement Showcase
Thinking about your own institutions...

- Are there any activities to help students feel part of a “research culture”...
  - Within their own departments?
  - At an institutional level?

- Are there professional development opportunities for doctoral students...
  - Within their own departments?
  - At an institutional level?

- Are there any social opportunities for doctoral students...
  - Within their own departments?
  - At an institutional level?
Why do you offer the things you do?
Have they been successful or not?
How do you measure success?
How do you know that students actually want the things you provide for them?
Institutional-wide review of doctoral student activities and engagement

March 2019 - June 2019
Rationale for a review

- Review Doctoral College offering as a new service
  - Collective approach to enhancing the doctoral experience

- Varying attendance at events/activities

- Understand the relationship between students and their departments/DTEs

- We don’t speak to students enough!
How we conducted the review

Mapping exercise
- Reviewed existing provision within departments and DTEs
- Reflected and evaluated on own activities
- Cross-referenced to the roles of other Doctoral Colleges

Series of focus groups
- Organised at a departmental level
- 54 participants over 13 sessions
- Diverse range of participants

Action Planning
- Agreed objectives and activities for 2019/20
- Consulted with other services to inform them of our plans
- Planned Engagement event to disseminate wider learning
Sense of belonging

University
Faculty
Department
Research cluster
Cohort
Office
Barriers to engagement

- Working hours
- Managing time
- Guilt & expectations
- Solo attendance
- Place of work
- Supervision
- Comms
- Amount of activities
Communications & identity

staff

student
“I know services are for undergraduates, but can I use them, will they be able to help me?”
And lets not forget about our mid-year starters....
Lessons Learnt

- Shared responsibility across the University for doctoral education

- We often want students to come to our events and activities without considering the broader programme

- Work with existing doctoral communities at a local level before creating new ones

- Institutionally recognise that the nature of a doctorate may affect student commitment

- If we continue allowing students to start throughout the year then we need to show commitment in terms of an equal student induction experience
Moving forward

- Clarify the role of the Associate Dean (Research) in relation to including doctoral students within faculty and departmental research activities.

- Revised Doctoral College events programme with fewer activities with a focus on induction and researcher development.

- Review webpages to ensure that we are signposting other doctoral services and activities effectively as well as reinforcing who we are and what we do.

- Explore the possibility of advertising centrally departmental research seminars which are open to all students.
What we would be interested to know

1. Do you experience the same challenges identified within your own institutions?

2. What have you done/will you do as a result of these challenges?
Another event? Another activity? Do doctoral students actually want it?

We’ll find out in our evaluation in 2020!

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