

ENHANCING CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL DOCTORAL NETWORKS THROUGH A CO-PARTNERSHIP MODEL

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A co-partnership model is both ethical and aligned with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) values. This brief for EDI Leads and doctoral scholars (postgraduate researchers or PGRs) applies these EDI principles to highlight how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) or Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) can facilitate establishing thriving doctoral networks.

PURPOSE, CONTEXT AND FINDINGS

- Doctoral scholars are in a precarious situation due to pressure to develop a high level of expertise while undertaking a substantial, prolonged doctoral workload, often in isolation. Any of these can trigger uncertainties and/or lead to well-being concerns.
- Given the more complex journey confronting those with barriers to research engagement, e.g. those with disabilities, part-time PGRs, those from other academic contexts, we explored how doctoral networks may facilitate transformative doctoral progression, completion and post-PhD preparation.
- Evidence from this InFrame-funded project highlights how communities can foster scholarly growth and address PGRs' social and psychological needs.
- The impact and benefits of the co-partnership model are highly visible. This model is empowering and promotes leadership, co-ownership & accountability. This brief indicates crucial steps for adopting a co-partnership model for doctoral networks.



SUGGESTIONS FOR ADOPTING A CO-PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Set up

EDI Leads collaborating with PGRs

- Establish a 'co-partnership model' with PGRs to pursue equitable practices.
- Frame the co-partnership model as a means of advancing doctoral scholars' leadership skills while creating reciprocally supportive doctoral experience.
- Organise activities based upon existing resources from HEIs, CDTs, DTPs.

Engage

Fostering meaningful doctoral experience

- Prioritise events & activities that address PGRs' pragmatic ideas and shared concerns.
- Ensure clarity of roles before, during and after each event or activity.

Evaluate & Sustain

Beyond scholarly networks

- Build a community, cultivate well-being and establish a genuine sense of belonging.
- Seek formal & informal feedback from members to inform future events & activities.
- EDI PGR networks will benefit from viable external support, e.g. an EDI committee, a leadership group or designated staff member(s), enabling continuity.

CONSIDERATIONS, OBJECTIVES AND DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR DOCTORAL NETWORKS EMPLOYING A CO-PARTNERSHIP MODEL

EDI Leads setting up close collaboration with doctoral scholars

- Create PGR networks with support from HEIs, CDTs or DTPs.
- Invite network members to express their interest in co-leading the network.
- Articulate how the 'co-partnership model' strongly conveys the EDI principles since this model promotes an inclusive and equitable partnership between EDI Leads and PGR Network Co-Leads – involving co-designing and co-delivering network events and activities.
- Consider different ways of inviting network members and deciding on the most suitable platform for regular communication, e.g. Teams, SGSSS Portal.
- Explore feasible activities that can be organised with HEIs', CDTs' and/or DTPs' support. Given the increased use of technology, webinars or online discussions for network members can be offered even with no or very little funding.

Fostering meaningful, supportive doctoral experience

- Empower, support PGR Co-Leads through leadership opportunities and rewards.
- EDI Leads and PGR Co-Leads actively and constantly exchange ideas to improve the experience of network members, e.g. potential speakers, topics and activities.
- Brainstorm with network members to seek activities that can offer invaluable support, e.g. mock viva, EDI matters, a platform for discussing shared concerns.
- Have a provisional network event calendar; this is complemented by monthly communication to discuss agreed remit for the next event, e.g. promoting, facilitating the event, monitoring questions from the audience.
- Give weight to both scholarly and social events as well as online and in-person activities, resources permitting. EDI Leads and PGR Co-Leads value and facilitate constructive and critical discussion while keeping difficult exchanges respectful, inclusive and productive.
- Share anonymous meaningful comments and feedback when inviting other PGRs to join PGR networks, e.g. via a poster shared on social media.

Beyond scholarly networks and towards a 'whole person approach'

- Network members view their network affiliation as supportive of both scholarly and psychological space.
- Networks serve as channels for building a community, cultivating well-being and establishing a genuine sense of belonging.
- Encourage network members to pursue smaller communities, e.g. PGRs from different universities but who reside in the same city; PGRs pursuing similar topics or methods.
- Continuously seek either formal or informal feedback following network participation to inform prioritising future events and activities, including invitation for PGR-led discussions.
- Encourage active and ongoing communication among EDI Leads, PGR Co-Leads and network members between events and meetings via the chosen platform for communication to foster stronger connection and healthy relationships.
- Offer ongoing support to empower PGR Co-Leads, as appropriate, especially since a network with PGR Co-Leads is viewed as 'more attractive' among network members.
- Model 'flattening of hierarchy' to stress that network members' voices matter – encouraging everyone to share their views and opinions, even taking the lead on network activities.



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