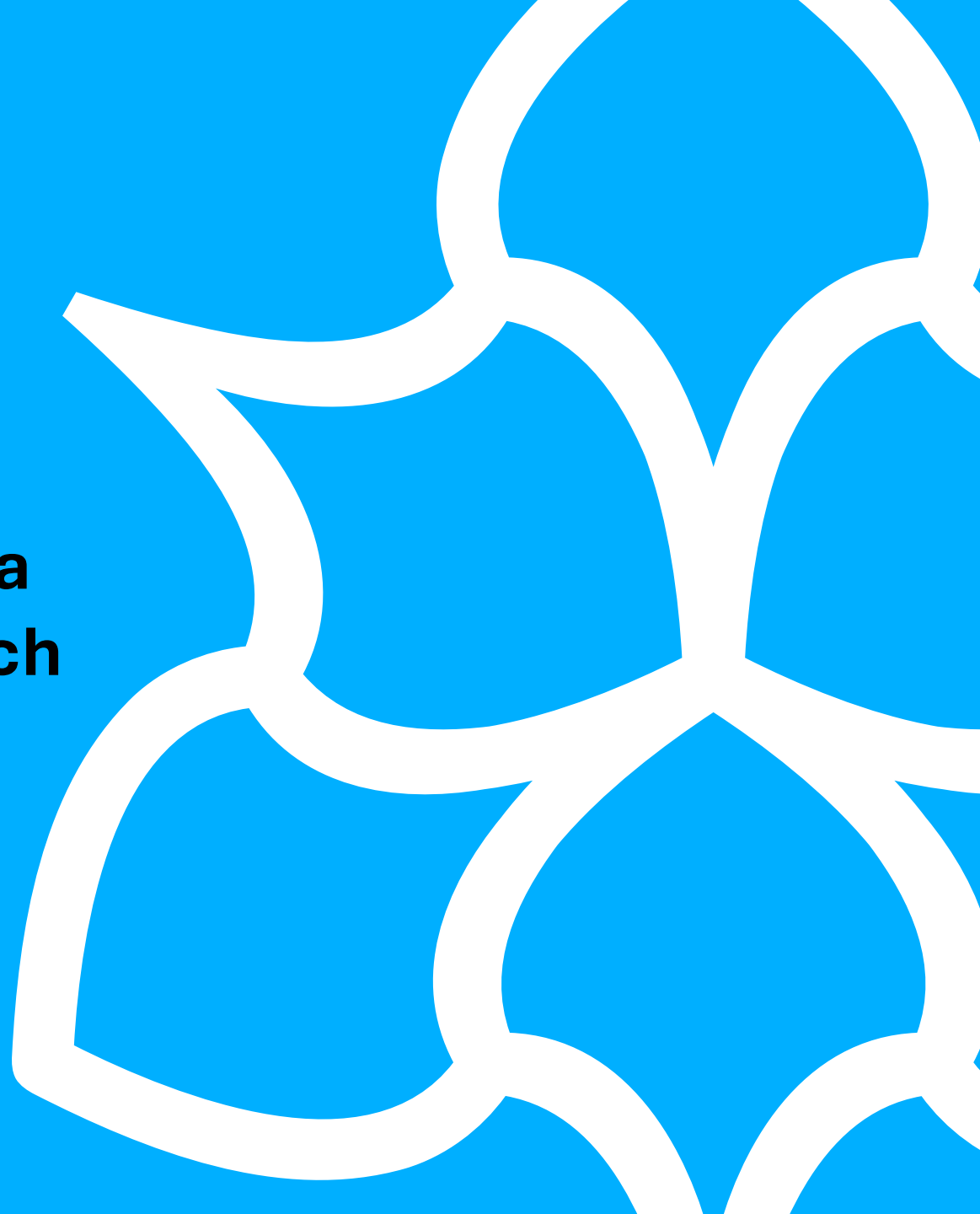


**Manchester  
Metropolitan  
University**

## **Building a vibrant community for a diverse cohort of doctoral research students**

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## Presentation Focus

**1**

Understanding community

**2**

Community as place, networks and identity

**3**

The Doctoral College at Manchester Met

**4**

What does a vibrant doctoral community look like?

**5**

How do we build community for (and with) doctoral students?

**6**

Questions and comments

# Understanding community

- Although a familiar term, community is an elusive and contested concept.
- Generally accepted that community is a 'good thing', its absence a 'bad thing'
- Often, it is 'idealized' (Crow, 2002)
- It represents security, warmth and cosiness (Bauman, 2001)
- Something shared (Cohen, 1982)

# Understanding community

- It can be imagined (Anderson, 1983; 2006)
- Social (Amit, 2012)
- Symbolic and utilitarian (Cohen, 1985; Delanty, 2003)
- Concrete and material, (Amit and Rapport, 2002)
- Temporary (Korpela and Dervin, 2013)
- It can be ephemeral, tangible and pragmatic (Ahmed, 2015)

# Understanding community

- People can belong to multiple communities simultaneously
- Community can be understood as representing a physical context (place), social (networks) and identity – so as multi-dimensional forms of belonging (Ahmed, 2011)
- Place, networks and identity are inextricably linked and reinforce one another (Ahmed, 2015)

# Community as place, networks and identity

- **Place**

- An emotional and embodied connection to the world (May, 2013)
- A group of people who are primarily bound together through where they live/work, etc
- The context where networks are formed and identities performed (Ahmed, 2012; 2015)

- **Networks**

- Relational belongings (May, 2013)
- Processes of exclusion and integration: who is in and who is out (Ahmed, 2012)

- **Identity**

- There are numerous 'identities' which one could feel and think one 'is: - gender/race/ethnicity/class/religion/age/culture/sexuality etc

(Ahmed & Rogers, 2016)

# Community – in summary

- Community can be understood to represent an ideal and a solution to social problems
- It is often imbued with nostalgia (Ahmed, 2015; 2020)
- It can also be symbolic, imagined, pragmatic, utilitarian and temporary (Ahmed, 2015; 2023)
- It has numerous representations, involving different forms of belonging, to places, networks and identities
- Looking at what communities people feel they belong to illuminates the contexts in which people's lives are lived and processes of social change

# Manchester Met's Doctoral College

- Launched in January 2024
- **Vision:** to create a **vibrant doctoral community** which encompasses belonging to:
  - *place* (Man Met),
  - *networks* (of peers/researchers)
  - and a *shared identity*.

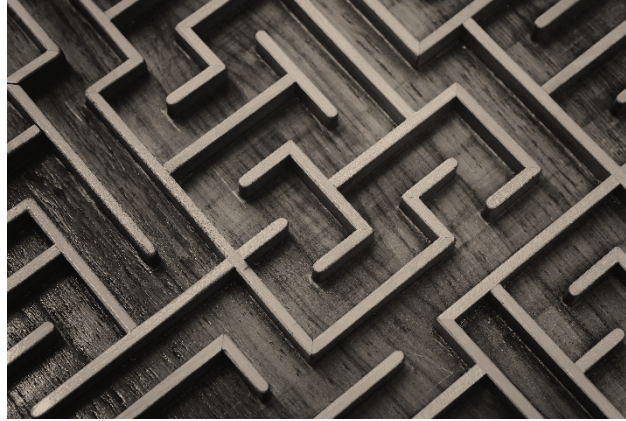
# Manchester Met's Doctoral College

- Approximately 43,000 students at Manchester Met
- <1,000 are doctoral students
- A diverse doctoral student body
- Ambitions to become a dual-intensive modern university & strategic priorities
- Ambitions to develop and embed an inclusive ethos and raise the profile of doctoral studies and students in the university

# Doctoral College: The Three Pillars



Doctoral Services



Academic Leadership



Doctoral Student  
Development

# What does a vibrant doctoral community look like?

- An environment in which students feel heard, known and understood, and can fulfil their potential and achieve their goals
- An inclusive and supportive culture in which students can embed themselves and begin to launch their future careers and make contributions to Manchester Met and to their field
- A learning environment where students' training and education needs are fully met

# What does a vibrant doctoral community look like?

- Doctoral students engage with excellent supervision, conduct impactful, quality research with integrity and where opportunities for career development are embedded and encouraged.
- An environment where supervisors are at the forefront of their fields and are actively involved in their own research and that of their students'.

# What does a vibrant doctoral community look like?

- **Also depends on certain measurable criteria being met:**
- Clarity of roles, responsibilities and communication between students and supervisors/other stakeholders
- Clear processes to address breaches
- Robust data capture mechanisms to monitor progress
- Timely completion of doctoral research
- Alumni whose ongoing work shines a light back to their Manchester Met experience

# But how do we 'build' community?

- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion= key
- Community creation – as a 'top down' activity can be problematic
- Community building – by its members, more likely to be effective and sustainable. (Ahmed & Rogers, 2016)
  
- **Co-creation**
  - - jointly identifying problems and solutions
  - - implementation of solutions to problems
  - - and working together to find ways to do this most effectively

# How do we build community?

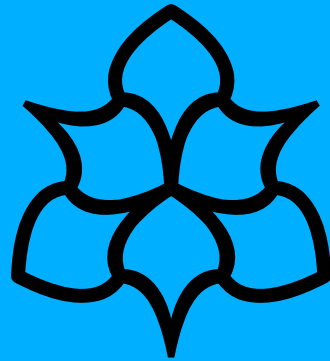
- Consolidation of academic leadership team(s)
- Clear delineation of responsibility remit between the three pillars
- Development of operational plan with measurable targets, ownership and accountability
- Securing buy in from all relevant stakeholders
- Identifying enablers and constraints to embedding the strategy with a range of stakeholders – students, supervisors, HoDs, PS staff - across the university

# How do we build community?

- Engagement with supervisors – research culture lunches, induction, training, skills development, Supervisor Bulletin & Supervisor Hub
- Ongoing engagement with doctoral students – research culture lunches, faculty specific and cross faculty training, Student Digest & Student Hub
- Doctoral College Faculty and Department leads and visibility/comms
- Department research culture plans
- Supported the establishment of Doctoral Student Society

# Summing up

- At early stage of our ‘journey’ towards community building
- Community development for and **with** our doctoral students
- Place, networks and identity are all important and mutually reinforcing
- Ongoing meaningful dialogue essential



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**Any questions/comments?**

Thank you for listening