

Research Degree Programme Audit Issues at Institution Level

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Summary



- Introduction
- Institutional Context
- Audit Context
- Examples of Durham Approach
- Key themes
- Conclusions

The Graduate School

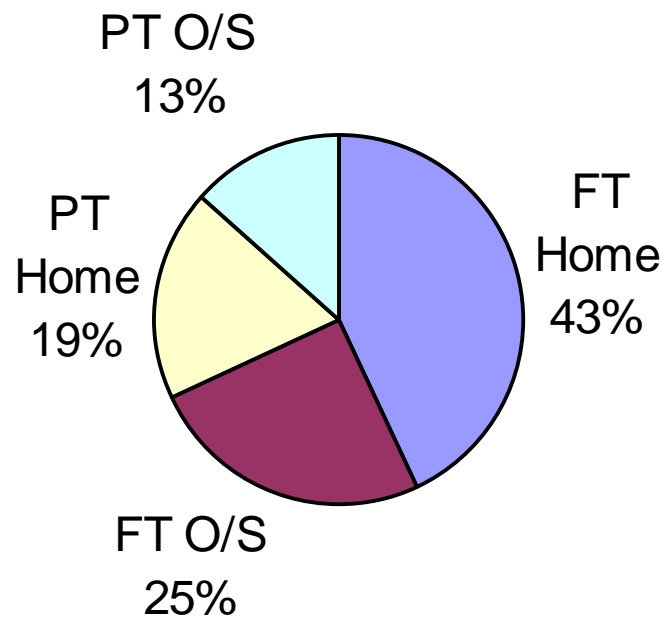
Postgraduate Numbers – 2007/08 figures

- 1400 Research Postgraduate Students (+ continuation)
- 2631 Taught Postgraduate Students

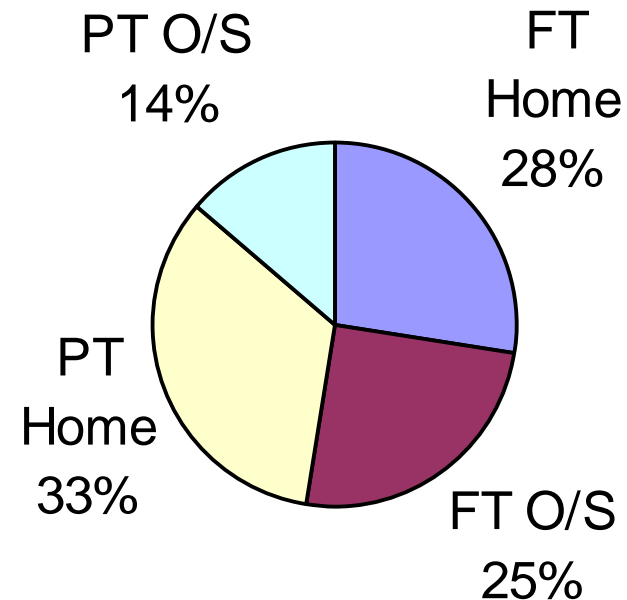
	Total	Total	PGT	PGR
• 2336 Full time students		58%	53%	68%
• 1695 Part time students		42%	57%	32%
• 2469 Home students		61%	61%	68%
• 1562 Overseas students		39%	39%	32%

Postgraduate Student Demographics

Academic year 2007/2008

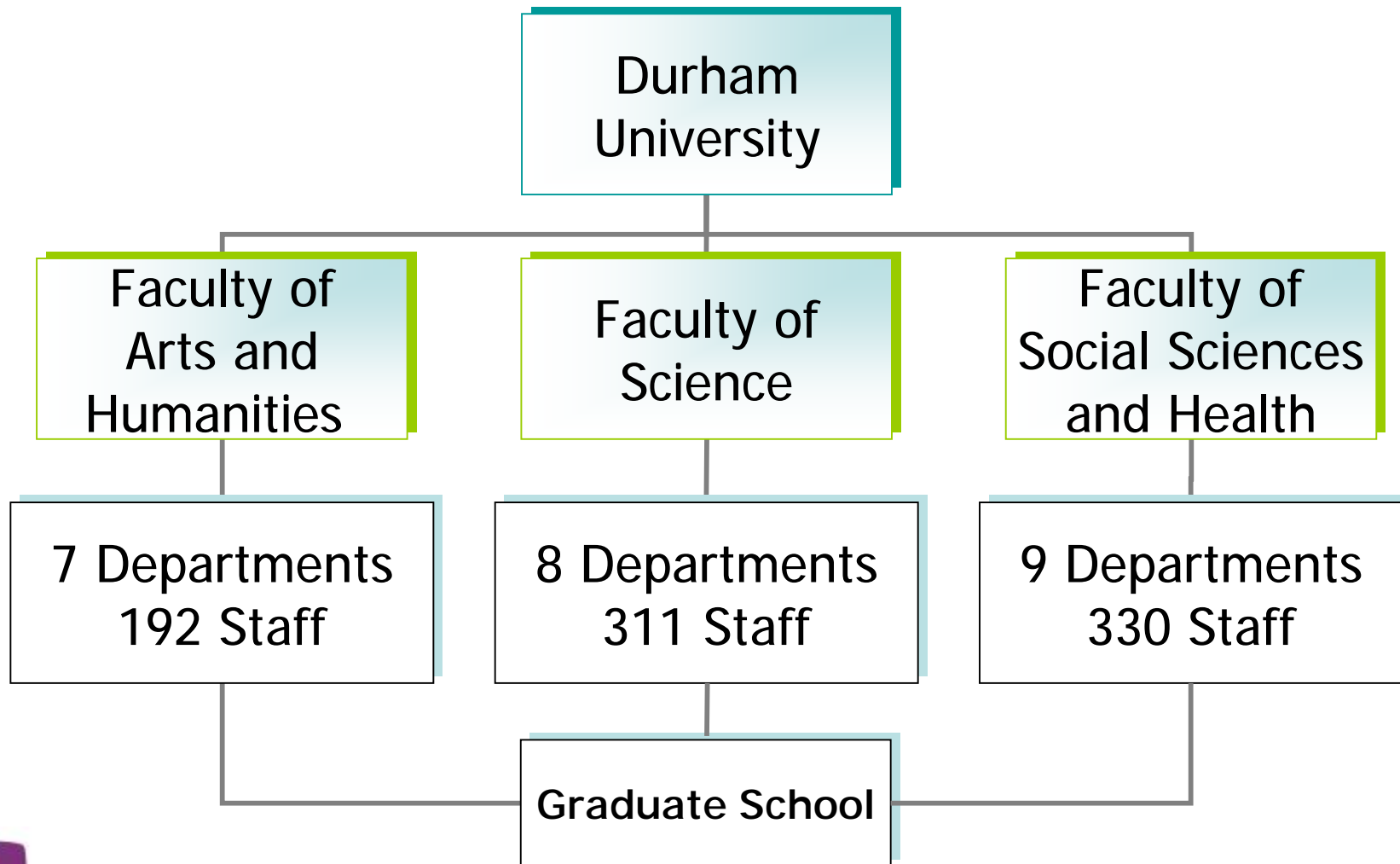


Research Students

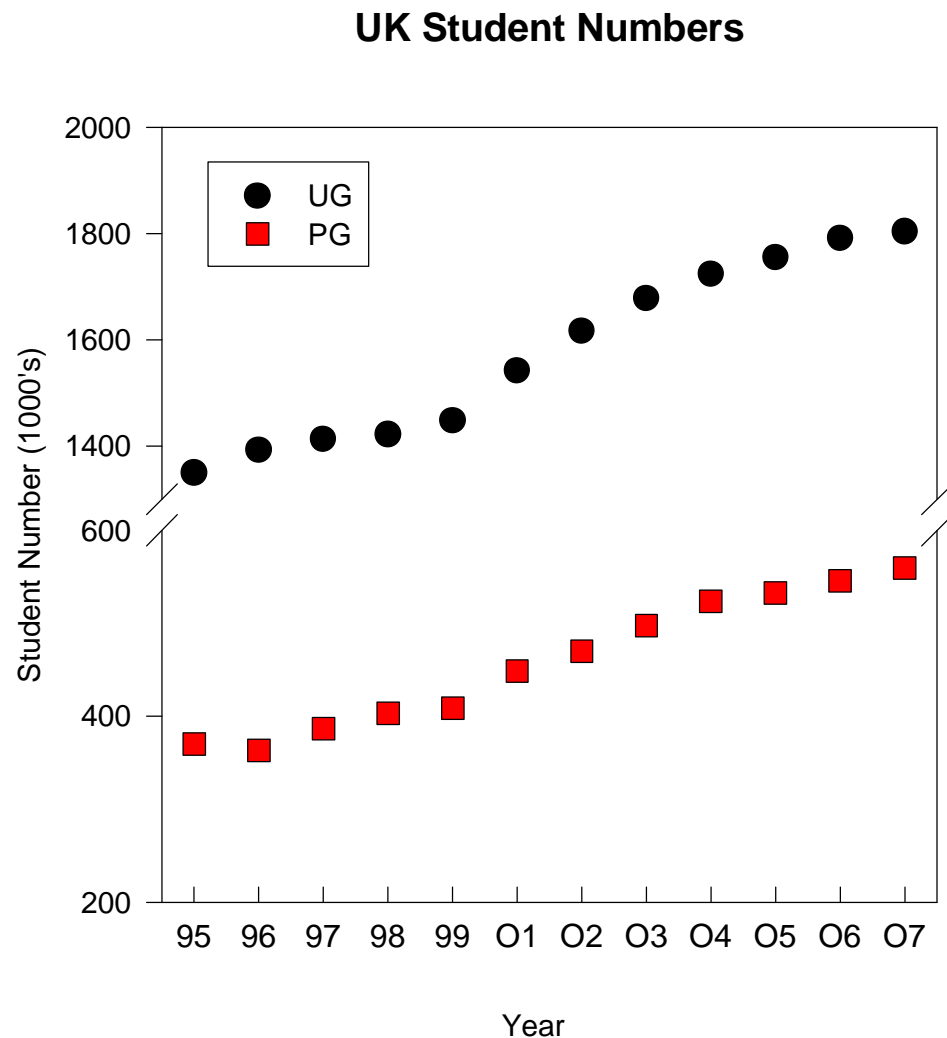


Taught Students

Faculties and Departments



Increasing UK Student Numbers



From 96/97 to 06/07

- UG 30% increase
- PG 43% increase

From 00 to 04/05

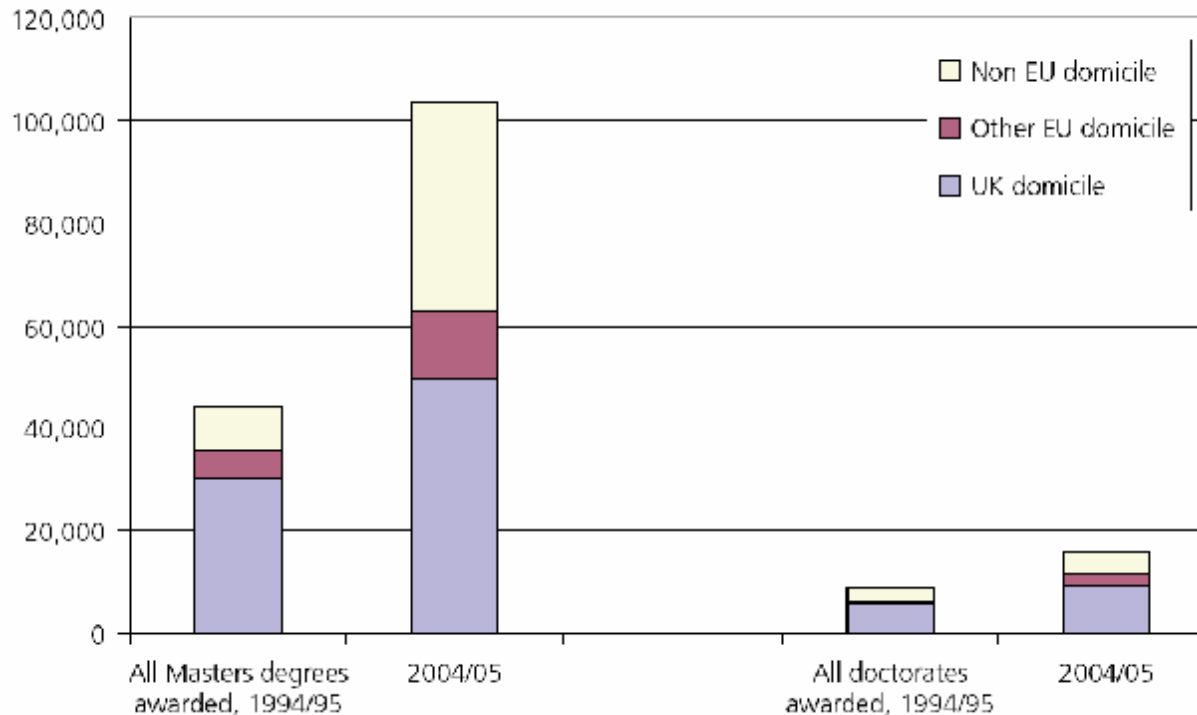
- PGR 28% increase
- PGT 69% increase

PG Totals 2004/05

- PGT 420,000
- PGR 112,000

- **Prime Ministers Initiative**
– **Phase 2 – April 2006**

Some National Statistics



- In 10 years:
- Masters awarded up by 133%, Doctorates by 79%, cf. first degrees up by 29%
 - Masters: science degrees constant at ~30%
 - Doctorates: science degrees decline from 65% to 57%

External Drivers



Key Issues:

- Staff engagement
- Audit not in vacuum

Some Trends

- Massification
 - Driven by economic growth considerations and “knowledge economies”. Many governments want Higher Education to cover substantial proportions of their populations.
- Diversification
 - People entering HE from large range of backgrounds – many have no tradition of HE
- Internationalisation
 - Growing recognition of value of incorporating large range of nationals into institution.

Government

Investing in our future

"Britain can only succeed in a rapidly changing world if we develop the skills of our people to the fullest possible extent, carry out world class research and scholarship, and apply both knowledge and skills to create an innovative and competitive economy. The DIUS mission is to work with our partners to meet these challenges."



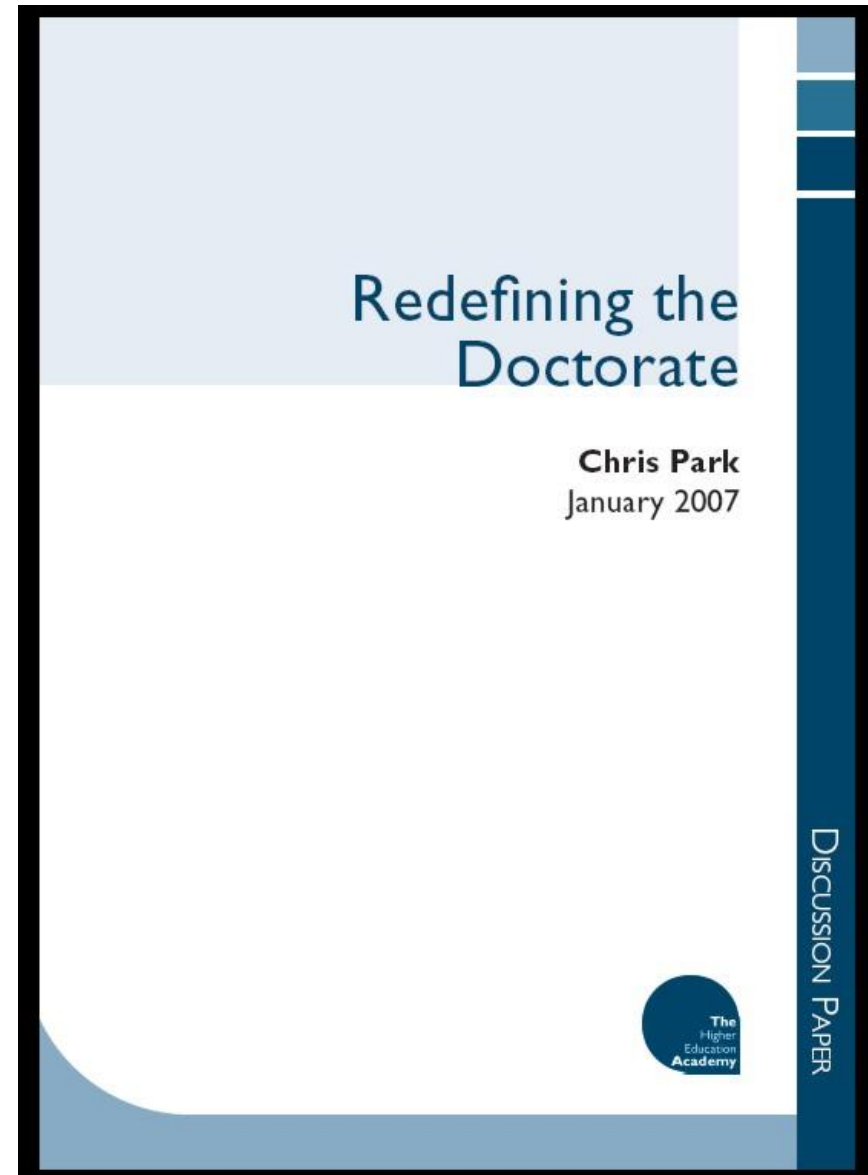
Department for
**Innovation,
Universities &
Skills**

Global Context

- Trends that will shape the economy over the next decade include:
 - growing rewards from innovation, as the pace of technological change increases and countries move into higher-value activities;
 - the importance of higher skill levels
- Need to improve the UK's capacity for science and innovation
 - Investment in the science base
 - Improving links with business
 - Attract foreign direct investment
 - Build high value-added firms that will raise private investment

HEA Debate

“Many commentators and observers believe that the time is right and the sector is ready for a national debate in the UK on the nature of the doctorate, given the multiple drivers for change, multiple agendas at work, and the multiple stakeholders with an interest in both the debate and the outcome. This discussion paper is designed to help frame and inform such a debate, which will not only bring together the major stakeholder groups in a shared conversation but also provide opportunities for members of the academic community to contribute to the discussion via a series of national workshops and meetings.”



Academic Infrastructure

- Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
- Codes of Practice
- Subject Benchmark Statements
- Programme Specifications

QAA has worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure.

Shared ownership



**The Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education**

FHEQ

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

Institutions have:

- To demonstrate that each of their qualifications is allocated to an appropriate level in the framework
- To ensure that all of the relevant outcomes in the national framework are assessed as part of the programme
- To ensure that all of the relevant outcomes in the national framework are covered in curricula for the programme.

Codes of Practice

10 Sections:

1. Postgraduate research programmes
2. Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)
3. Students with disabilities
4. External examining
5. Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters
6. Assessment of students
7. Programme design, approval, monitoring and review
8. Career education, information and guidance
9. Placement learning
10. Admissions to higher education

Code of Practice

- The different Codes of Practice are intended to set out standard criteria for good practice in all aspects of higher education.
- Codes are presented as sets of precepts to be incorporated into institutional practice.
- Precepts expanded by explanatory text.

Foreword to QAA Code

- “Academic staff in departments and schools do not necessarily need to be aware of the detail of the various sections of the Code, although they might well be expected to be familiar with the institutional policies it informs and any parts which are particularly relevant to their own responsibilities.”



**The Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education**

Code of Practice for Research Progs.

Example of precepts:

Institutional arrangements

1. Institutions will put in place effective arrangements to maintain appropriate academic standards and enhance the quality of postgraduate research programmes.
2. Institutional regulations for postgraduate research degree programmes will be clear and readily available to students and staff. Where appropriate, regulations will be supplemented by similarly accessible, subject-specific guidance at the level of the faculty, school or department.
3. Institutions will develop, implement and keep under review a code or codes of practice applicable across the institution, which include(s) the areas covered by this document. The code(s) should be readily available to all students and staff involved in postgraduate research programmes.
4. Institutions will monitor the success of their postgraduate research programmes against appropriate internal and/or external indicators and targets.

Special Review – Main Issues for Durham

- Management of supervision (range of models)
 - Maximum numbers of students per supervisor
 - 6 –12 across departments
 - Level of contact
 - 20% of departments had clear policy
 - Varied from “everyday” to “ twice per term”
- Assessment
 - Independent chair of viva
 - Professional Doctorates
- Generic Training – what is it?

Post Special Review

- Clearer structures
- Articulated expectations
- On-going dialogue
- Focus on student experience
- Institutional rationale for doctoral programmes
- New and innovative practices
 - Collaborative awards
 - Training
 - Professional Doctorates
 - Part time study
- **Embedding of new procedures**

Institutional Audit

QAA Institutional Audit

- Mechanism by which QAA monitors an institutions adherence to the academic infrastructure.

Aims of process are to meet the public interest:

- Ensuring academic standards (FHEQ)
- Effective learning opportunities
- Enhancing quality of provision
- Secure management of UK awards
- Students, employers and others have access to comprehensive information
- **Accountability**

Institutional audit is:

- An evidence-based process carried out through peer review
 - Sampling trails – institution's way of managing academic standards and quality of provision
 - Supplementary trails – specific topics proposed by the institution accepted by the audit team
- Focused on institutions' management of provision, not on the provision directly
- Designed to have an emphasis on students and their learning
- Defined in the Handbook for Institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2006
 - <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/>

Defining standards and quality

- **academic standards** are predetermined and explicit levels of achievement which must be reached for a student to be granted a qualification (FHEQ) (*can not be enhanced*)
- **academic quality** is a way of describing the effectiveness of everything that is done or provided (the 'learning opportunities') to ensure that students have the best possible opportunity to meet the stated outcomes of their programmes and the academic standards of the awards they are seeking

Features of good practice

In the context of our institution

- make a particularly positive contribution to the institution's approach to the management of the security of academic standards and the quality of provision

Audit teams comment on

- Specifically on postgraduate research programmes (one auditor assigned to this)
- Institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of educational provision
- Accuracy and completeness of public information

Postgraduate research programmes

- Teams will comment specifically on standards and quality of PGR programmes
- Commentary informed by:
 - Special review report
 - Briefing paper (may include update on developments since special review)
 - Scrutiny of relevant documents
 - Meetings with staff and students

Enhancement

- Process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities
- Enhancement of what?
 - Quality of learning opportunities - process, which can be enhanced
 - Academic standards defined and can not be enhanced
- is about systematic institutional-level action to bring about demonstrable improvements in the quality of learning opportunities
- is a management process, and would be expected to make effective use of management information
- is not about a collection of examples of innovation and/or good practice

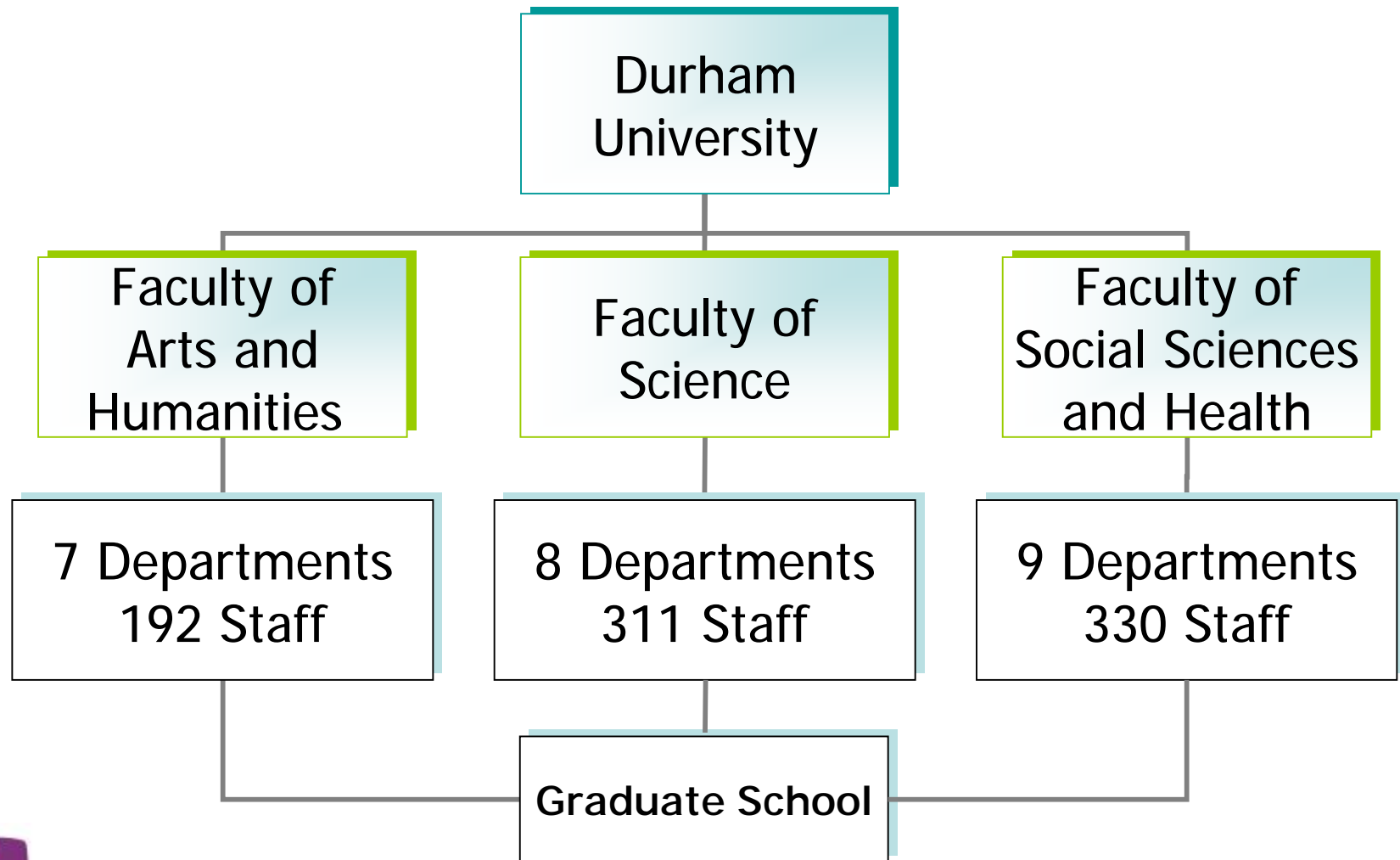
Good Practice

Difference between enhancement or good practice?

- ‘Good practice’ does not necessarily come from ‘taking deliberate steps at institutional level’
- ‘Enhancement’ – i.e. ‘taking deliberate steps at institutional level’ – does not necessarily generate particular examples of ‘good practice’

Role of Durham Graduate School

Faculties and Departments



Graduate School Committee

- Dean of the Graduate School (Chair)
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching)
- The Deputy Deans
- Director of Postgraduate Training
- Academic Staff Development Officer
- Representatives from academic departments
- Representatives from other administrative departments (International Office, Library, IT,)
- **Students**

Themes

- Emphasis changed from Assurance to Enhancement
- Increasing focus on Student Experience
- Greater understanding of research pedagogy and supervision
- Growing importance of research students at Durham
- Need for institutional oversight of ALL aspects
- Developing ideas about role of research degrees
- Internationalisation essential for long term
- Partnerships required to place postgraduate education correctly in all our societies
- Information, Transparency, Accountability

Graduate School

- Graduate School Committee takes lead on identifying issues for discussion
 - Response to specific issues
 - Identification of key issues
- Provides forum for exchange of views and consultation
 - Learning and Teaching Committee
 - Faculty Graduate Advisory Groups
 - Research Committee
- Proposals reported to:
 - Senate
 - Research Committee

What did we do last year?

- Annual Reports
- Tuition fees
- PG Admissions
- Postnominal letters
- HEFCE Qualification rates
- Buddy system
- Titles for research degrees
- eTHoS project
- Review of Collaborative Provision
- Plagiarism in research degrees
- Training for research supervisors
- Creating Inclusive Research Communities project
- Postgraduate Decliners survey
- Dissertation submission deadlines
- Postgraduate marketing materials and videos
- Revised Professional Doctorate Regulations
- Revised Core Regulations
- Staff Candidates
- Review of Code of Practice
- PRES National Survey
- Institutional Audit

Themes for the coming year

- Developing Collaborative Provision
- Professional and other Doctorates
- Review of PGT programmes
- Postgraduate Student Experience
- Qualification rates
- Bologna Process
- Electronic Theses
- PG Student Recruitment
- Graduate School Strategy – review
- Preparations for Institutional Audit

Examples of types of discussion

- QAA Consultation on Doctoral Programmes
 - Example of self reflective document
 - Review current provision
 - Identify areas for improvement/enhancement
- Code of Practice
 - Overview of management processes
- Departmental Reviews
 - Encouraging academic departments to be reflective
 - Reviewed at Graduate School Committee
- Example of Committee Minutes

Monitoring

- Very important to have institutional level oversight of PG performance
- Need forum to discuss and review performance measures
- Identify areas for improvement
- Developed Quality Management Framework
- Continuing to embed new processes:
 - Annual review of research degrees by academic departments
- Ongoing developments of established procedures

Conclusions

QAA Special Review Conclusions



QAA Special Review Conclusions

- “Some of the areas where institutions are finding it challenging to respond to the principles in the Code of practice could have been expected. For example, providing development opportunities for established supervisors; finding ways of assuring fairness and consistency in the oral examination; implementing more detailed assessment criteria. In these (and other) areas, it is appropriate for institutions to take time to assure themselves that they are taking the right steps for the institution and its students and staff, and to learn about practice elsewhere before finalising policy. This approach may also be likely to encourage ownership of new developments.”

Conclusions

- Audit is important – scrutiny of institutional procedures
- Opportunity to define what we offer?
- Need to get involved and engaged in the debate
- The external environment means we need to take the lead
- Routine monitoring and reflection on processes is key to improving support

Some Tensions

Equity of experience
Broader training
National curriculum for PhD
Demonstrating consistency
Supportive environment
Homogeneous
Uniformity
Compliance

Assurance



Enhancement

Range of mode of study
Academic standards
Subject diversity
Pedagogic variation
Independent learners
Heterogeneous
Alignment

References

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