



# Review of Doctoral Programmes at the University of Helsinki as Quality Assurance – was it worth the effort?

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# WITH THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE – FOR THE WORLD

Ranking among the top 1% of the world's research universities

Shanghai	101
Taiwan NTU	107
US News	99 (2022)
THE	121
QS	115

Annual turnover

**773M€**

Research funding

**253M€**

Result of fundraising campaign with government's match funding (2010-2023)

**288M€**

HELSINKI.FI

5000  
Doctoral  
researchers

**31 500**

Degree students  
6% international

**5 800**

Degrees per year

**4**

Campuses

**8 600**

Employees

58% teaching and research staff  
(29% international staff)

**200 000**

Alumni around the world

**11**

Faculties

## OUR VALUES

TRUTH  
BILDUNG  
FREEDOM  
INCLUSIVITY



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



# DOCTORAL EDUCATION AT UH IN NUMBERS

**~5000 DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS**

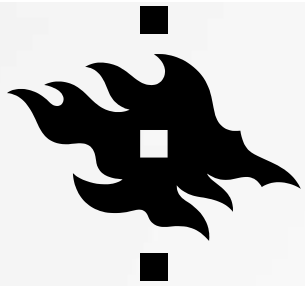
**24% INTERNATIONAL**

**1 DOCTORAL SCHOOL**

**33 DOCTORAL PROGRAMS**

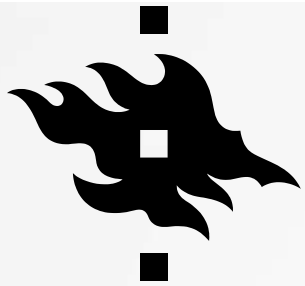
**630 DEGREES (YEARLY TARGET 2025-2028)**

**~98% EMPLOYMENT RATE**



# AGENDA FOR THE SESSION

- To present Review of the Doctoral Programmes organized at the University of Helsinki (UH) in 2023-2024. The Review is an essential component of UH's quality system aiming at systematic development of operations based on self-assessment
- To discuss the opportunities and challenges of a rather thorough organizational effort to assess quality of doctoral programmes, and to develop doctoral education



# TWO WORLDS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

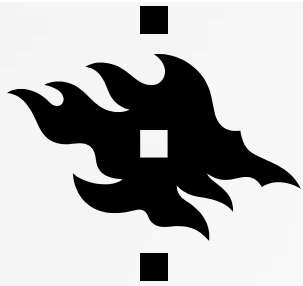
## ENHANCEMENT-LED

- Aiming for development
- Finding good practices and development areas
- Motivating the participants
- Usefulness for the participants
- Practices are developed together with the participants

University of UH

## ACCREDITATION

- For quality control
- Participation is compulsory
- QA practices are formal repeated on a regular basis
- Accreditation provides evidence of adequate quality



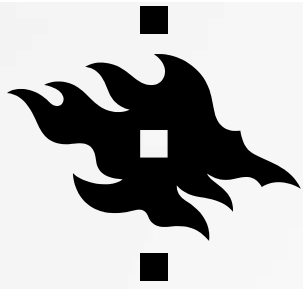
# QUALITY ASSURANCE AT THE UH: TWO PROCESSES

## 1. Doctoral programmes evaluate their operations every year: annual follow-up

- Annual follow-up since 2019
- Degree programmes assess their activities and current state: “How are we doing?”
- Information & key numbers available on a yearly basis
- Connected to operations management and documented on the status report form

## 2. Every three years, the wider academic community discusses the current state & future of degree programmes on specific themes → REVIEW

- Possibility to propose major changes to the educational structure and the operation of degree programmes
- Discussion & views of faculty councils and university-level committees are documented
- Review Themes 2023-2024: A) smooth student progression and B) overall structure of education, management & resources



# QA PROCESS: DOCTORAL EDUCATION

## REVIEW 2023

Based on the annual follow-up data 2021, 2022, 2023

Debriefing of the results and suggested measures in the DS Board

**INFORMATION**

- University Services generates information for the doctoral programmes

**OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE PROGRAMME**

- The steering group of the doctoral programme uses the information to analyse the programme operations, establish an overview of the current situation and document it.

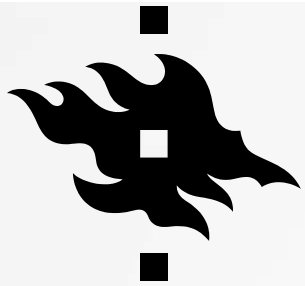
**MEASURES BY THE DOCTORAL PROGRAMME**

- The steering group plans operations based on the overview and lists the necessary measures (3–5) and resources for the programme, the faculty, and for the doctoral school.

**THE FACULTY'S IMPLEMENTATION PLAN  
THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL'S IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

- The vice-dean responsible for doctoral education collects the measures for faculty, and director of doctoral school collects the measures for the DS Board

The Strategic Plan at UH

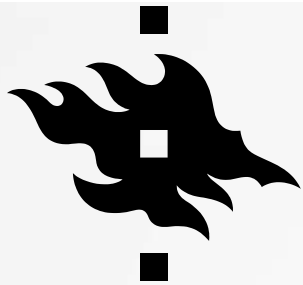


# ACTORS AND SCHEDULE OF THE REVIEW

- DP: Consider the doctoral programme's overall situation and identify development areas /[Fall 2023](#)
- FACULTIES: Consider the state of doctoral programmes of the faculty and identify development areas /[Fall 2023](#)
- DOCTORAL SCHOOL: Consider the state of degree education of the University and identify development areas /[Spring 2024](#)
  
- EXTERNAL EVALUATION PANEL: Evaluate the content and the process of the Review and identify development areas /[Spring 2024](#)

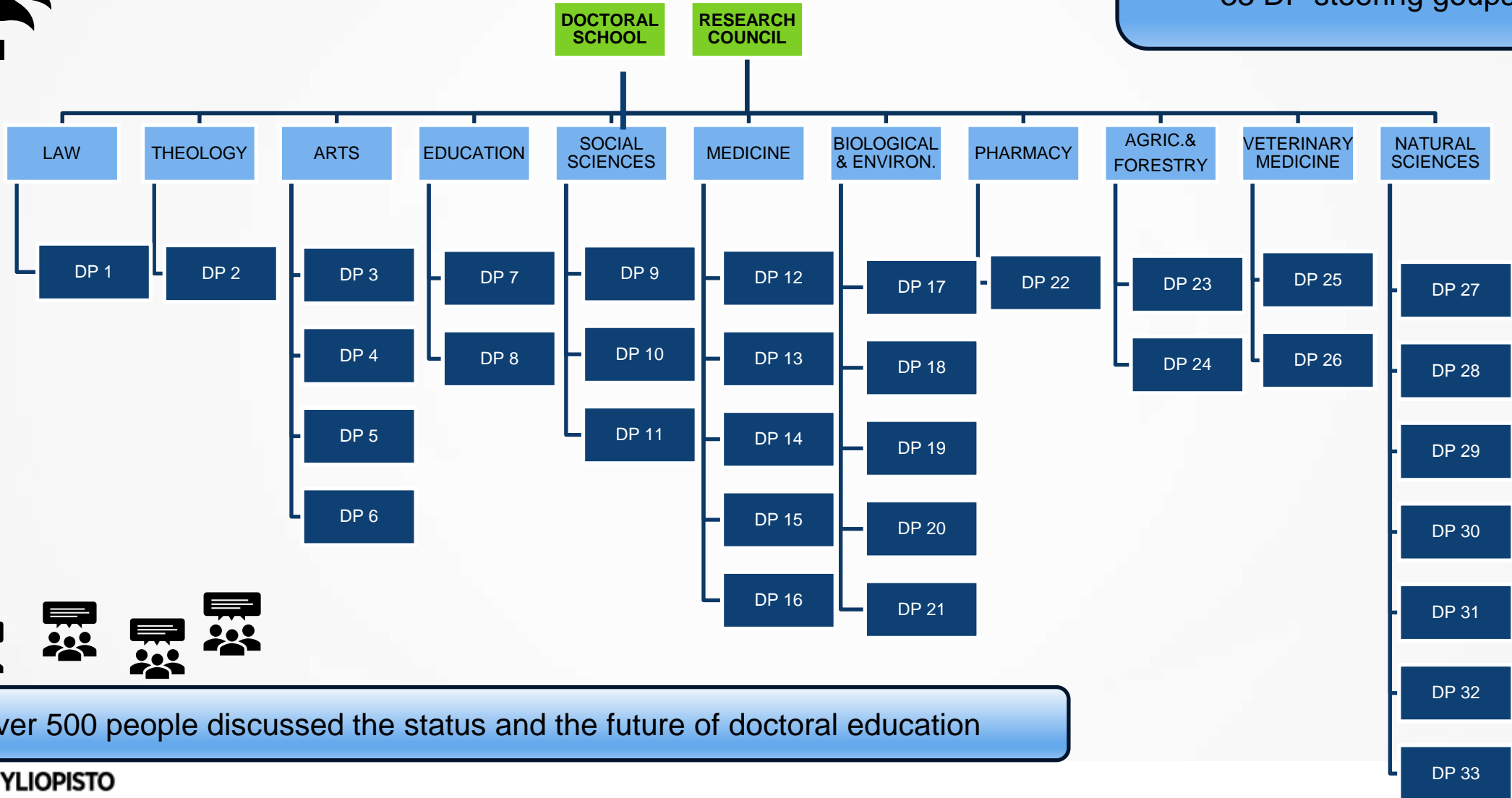




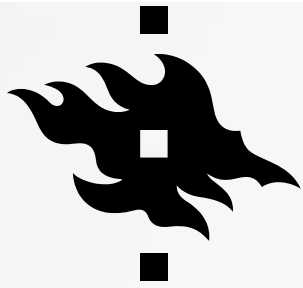


# COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION

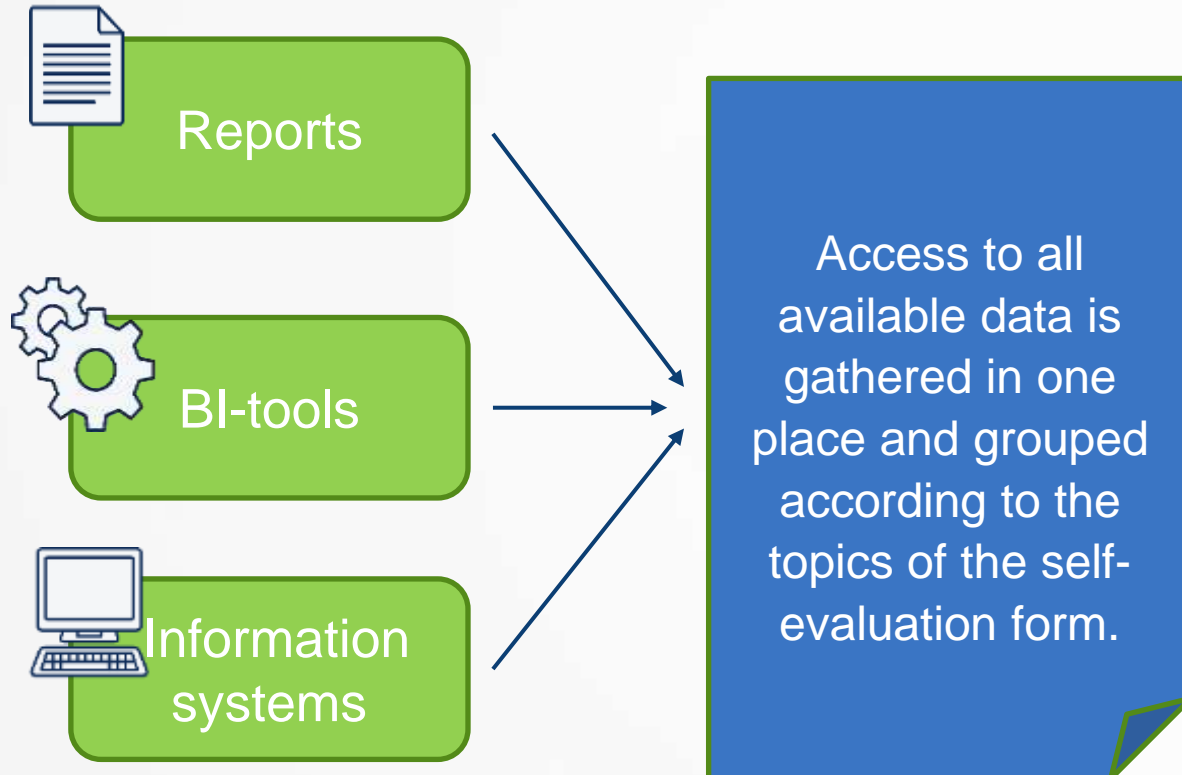
2 University level committees  
11 Faculty councils  
33 DP steering groups



Over 500 people discussed the status and the future of doctoral education



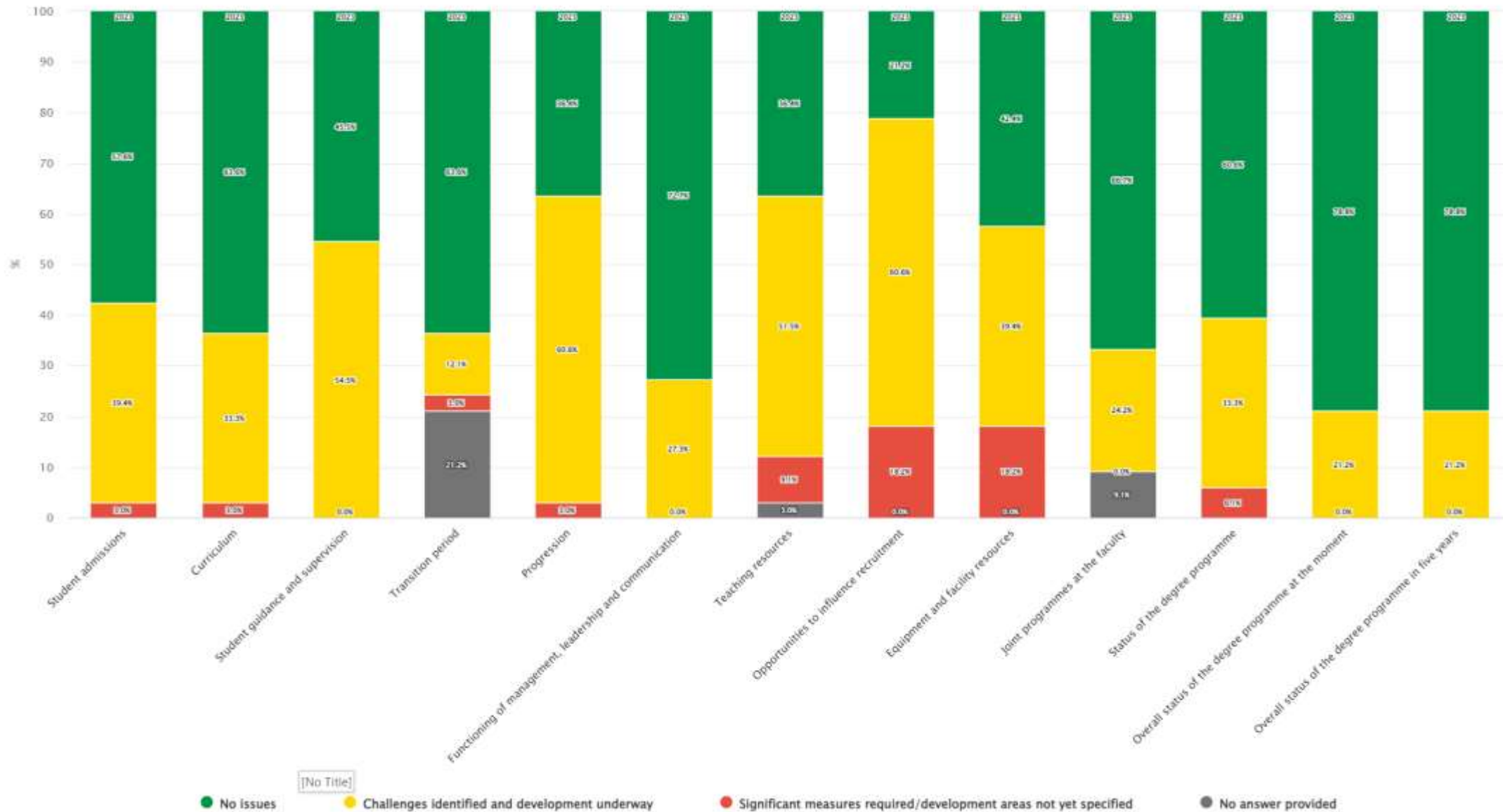
# DATA-BASED KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

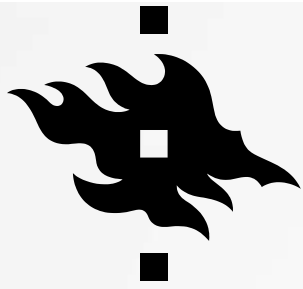


- **Statistics included e.g.:**

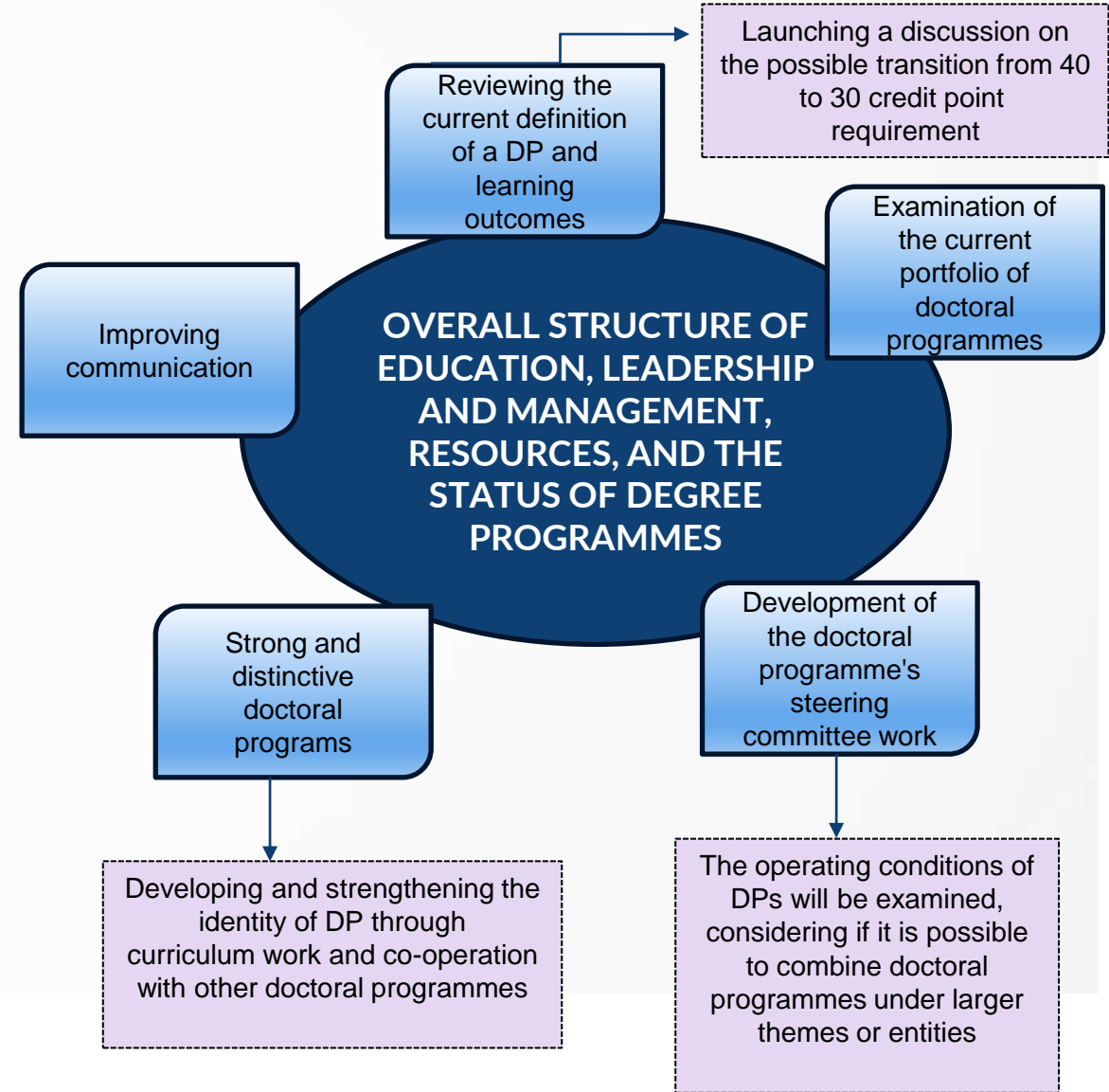
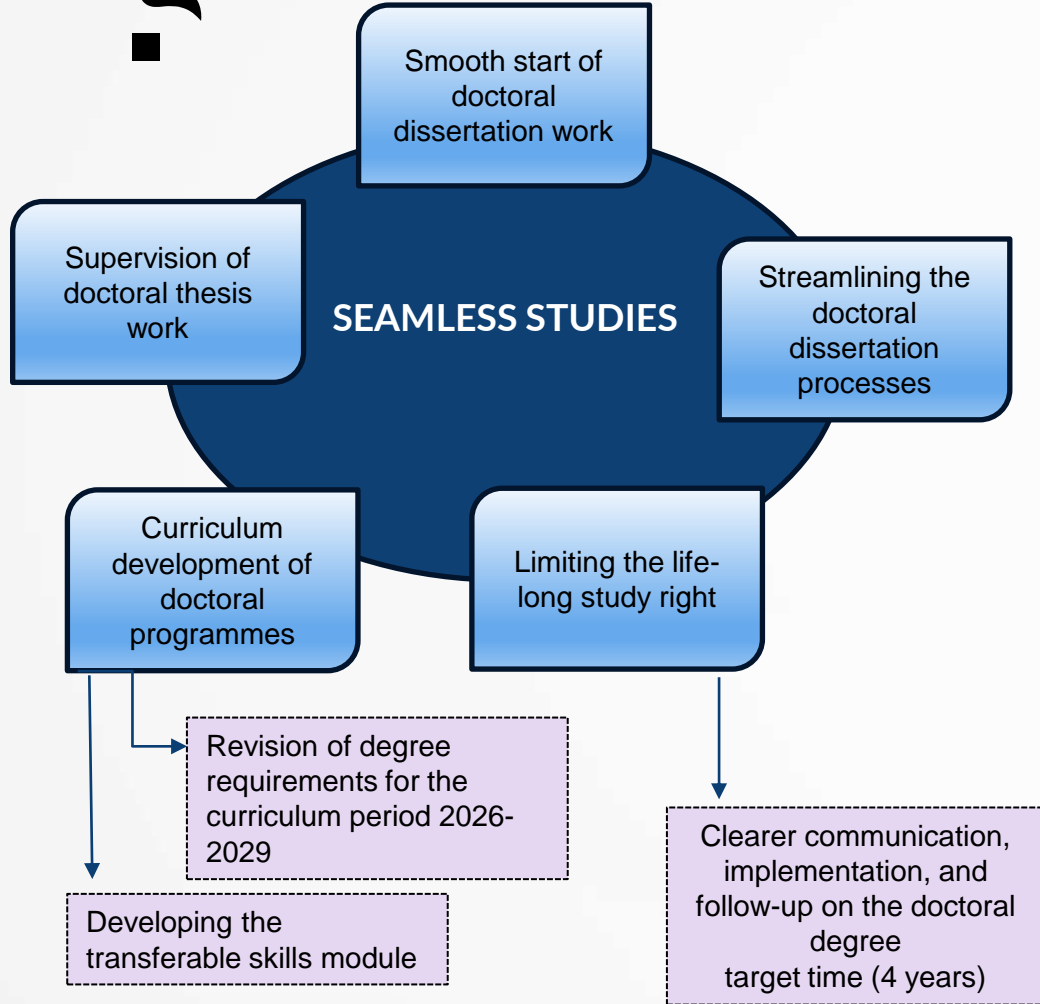
- Attractiveness of the programme: number of applicants and admission statistics
- Supervision plans, supervisory arrangements, and doctoral researchers' progress
- Organized courses and course feedback
- Productivity of the programme: degrees produced, employment and careers after graduation
- Different actors had different data needs and interests
- It was not obligatory to use the information provided -> the degree programmes could also have their own data sources and statistics

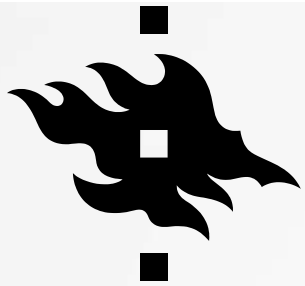
# DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES





# DOCTORAL SCHOOL: 10 DEVELOPMENT AREAS & 25 MEASURES





# RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FINAL REPORT -THE REVIEW OF DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

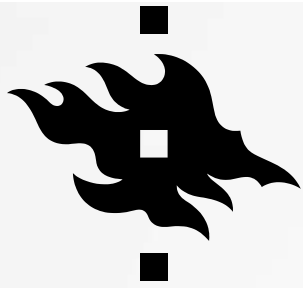
**Development area 1: Completing the doctoral degree in target time**

Development area 2: Transition phase from Master's to Doctoral Programme

Development area 3: Making the new Doctoral School structure permanent

**Development area 4: Developing the portfolio of doctoral programmes as a whole**

- By intensifying cooperation between doctoral programmes and possibly combining programmes, the university can offer doctoral researchers more multidisciplinary research environments and gain benefits in the work of programme management and coordination
- Examining the possibilities for cooperation between doctoral programmes both within the university and with other universities is necessary in the education of the growing number of doctoral researchers

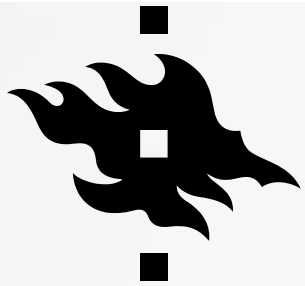


# FEEDBACK FROM THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION PANEL

“The University of Helsinki should support and further develop the model used in the review, which examined not only individual programmes based on their needs and context but also the University-level education framework (programme portfolio).“

“As an assessment method, the University’s annual follow-up and review raises the question of whether the same system can serve both monitoring by the leadership (commensurability) and development within the degree programmes.”

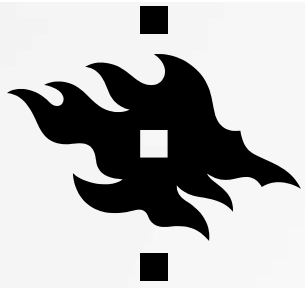
“Degree programmes and faculties can use the traffic light assessments as a monitoring tool. The significance of the traffic lights varies between programmes, faculties and even at the University level, so they cannot be used to draw conclusions on the status of programmes.“



# CONCLUSIONS

- For doctoral programmes, the Review was an opportunity to discuss their status and to suggest measures to the Doctoral School and Faculties
- The doctoral school and the faculties gained essential information for their implementation planning, and UH leadership learnt what kind of actions are needed
- However:
  - The same data could have been interpreted and used differently → powerplays and conflicting interests
  - Too close links to implementation planning processes might have hindered genuine self-assessments
  - Aspects raised in programmes could have been overlooked in the next phases (faculty-level or university committee level) of the process





# FOR DISCUSSION

- How to balance between enhancement-led quality assurance processes and strategic, data-driven operations management?
- How to facilitate genuine dialogue and responsible creativity in the face of changing educational landscape?

