Understanding the threats to postgraduate professional education

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A typology of postgraduate provision
(HEC 2012)

PG Taught	PG Professional	PG Research
Postgraduate diploma and Masters courses, extending an individual's knowledge or allowing them to convert to a new discipline	Professional certificates and diplomas	Research masters – e.g. MRes: includes methods training and often used as a stepping point to a PhD; MPhil: sometimes used as a PhD exit point
Integrated masters such as the MEng	PGCE and similar licences to practice	Traditional model PhD
Postgraduate modules, e.g. Open University courses	Vocational masters courses – either as CPD or preparing individual for a particular profession	'New route' PhD – with larger taught elements and wider skills training
	MBA	Some professional doctorates – that count in RAE / REF
	Some professional doctorates – where required as licence to practice but not included in REF (e.g. EdD, DBA)	

Postgraduate students at UK HEIs in 2010-11

PGR	103,255
PGT	456,640
PGP	87,070

(HEC 2012)

Current threats

- Weak home market in some fields bringing risk of market failure
- Fair access to postgraduate provision becoming new battle ground in widening participation
- Professional training privileged at expense of professional education

Public/private benefit

- Courses that have high public benefit but relatively low returns to individuals (e.g. Education, Social Work, etc)

- Courses that have high private benefit but, being largely privately funded, raise potential fair access issues (e.g. Law, Accountancy, etc)

The backgrounds of postgraduates and undergraduates

	Privately educated	***State school educated***
PG population	17%	83%
UG population	14%	86%
Total population	7%	93%

(Browne Report drawn from Sutton Trust, itself drawing on DLHE data)

The key concern

"Many professional qualifications lead to substantial personal financial gain and are therefore unlikely to be threatened by higher fees and debt, but there are **some**, around teaching and healthcare, as well as lower level positions in other fields, where that is really **not** the case. Even in the case of ultimately highly paid positions there may be access issues if fees are too high" (London Higher 2011)

A perfect storm?

- High levels of undergraduate debt
- Possibly higher postgraduate fees
- Reduced central Government support
- Waning employer support for professional development due to reduced budgets
- Real term reductions in practitioners' disposable income due to salary freezes and rising pension costs

Possible responses

- HEFCE subsidy
- Review of which Price Groups would most benefit from HEFCE subsidy
- Contributions from relevant government departments
- Employer contributions
- A student support package

At risk

- the UK’s standing internationally
- capacity within our economy
- fair access to the professions
- the case for postgraduate education