

**The Effectiveness of an External QA  
Process on Doctoral Programs in Ontario,  
Canada, 1990-2003**

Maurice Yeates

Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada

INQAAHE 2005

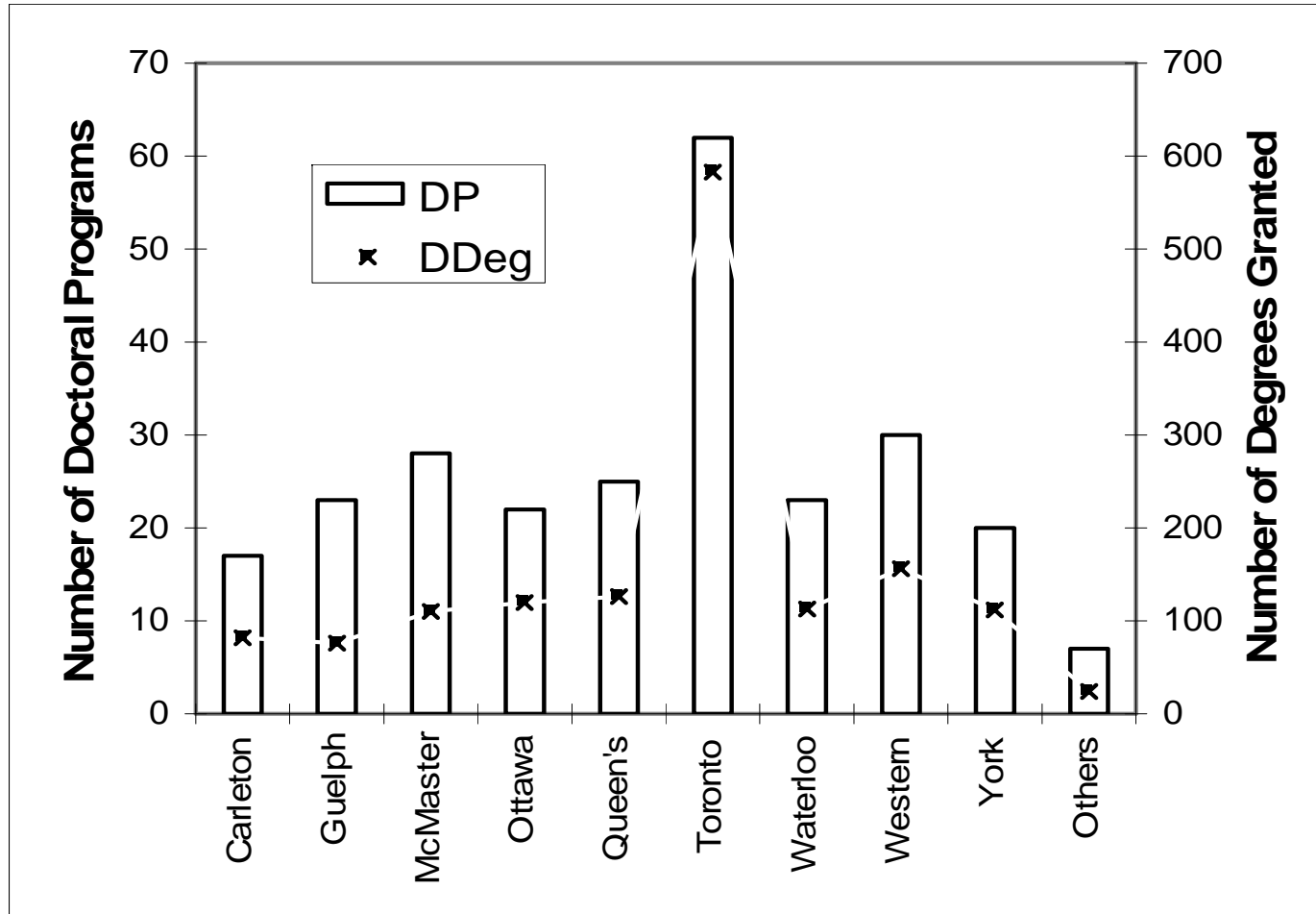
Wellington, NZ

March 29-April 2

# The QA Context

- Ontario Council on Graduate Studies Quality Assurance process – program based period review (7 year cycle).
- Operated and governed by the collectivity of Ontario universities through the Council of Ontario Universities.
- OCGS decides, on the basis of a common-content self-study, and external peer site visit reports, whether a program should continue; and, if necessary, what might be done to improve its quality.
- If OCGS agrees, on the basis of the Committee's recommendation, that a program not be approved to continue, the University involved has to discontinue the program.
- Given that in 2002/3 there were 254 doctoral programs in the provincial system (an increase from 205 in 1990/91), and many more masters programs, this external QA process is an extensive exercise.

# Doctoral Programs and Degrees Granted in Ontario Universities, 2002/3



# The Issue

- Doctoral time-to-completion (too long!) and graduation rates (too low – particularly in the humanities and social sciences), has been around a long time (eg. Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992).
- In Canada and Ontario the issue has now come to the ‘political’ fore because of:
  - projected national faculty requirements (an estimated 40,000 new faculty required by 2010);
  - requirements for more highly qualified researchers consequent to new R&D objectives articulated by the Federal Government, summarized in the call for Canada to rank fifth in the GERD ratio among OECD countries by 2010
  - a recent Provincial Report (Rae) calling for ‘timely completion’ in graduate programs if increased funding for graduate program expansion is to be forthcoming. (note: in Canada the Provinces have control over Education and its funding).

# The Question

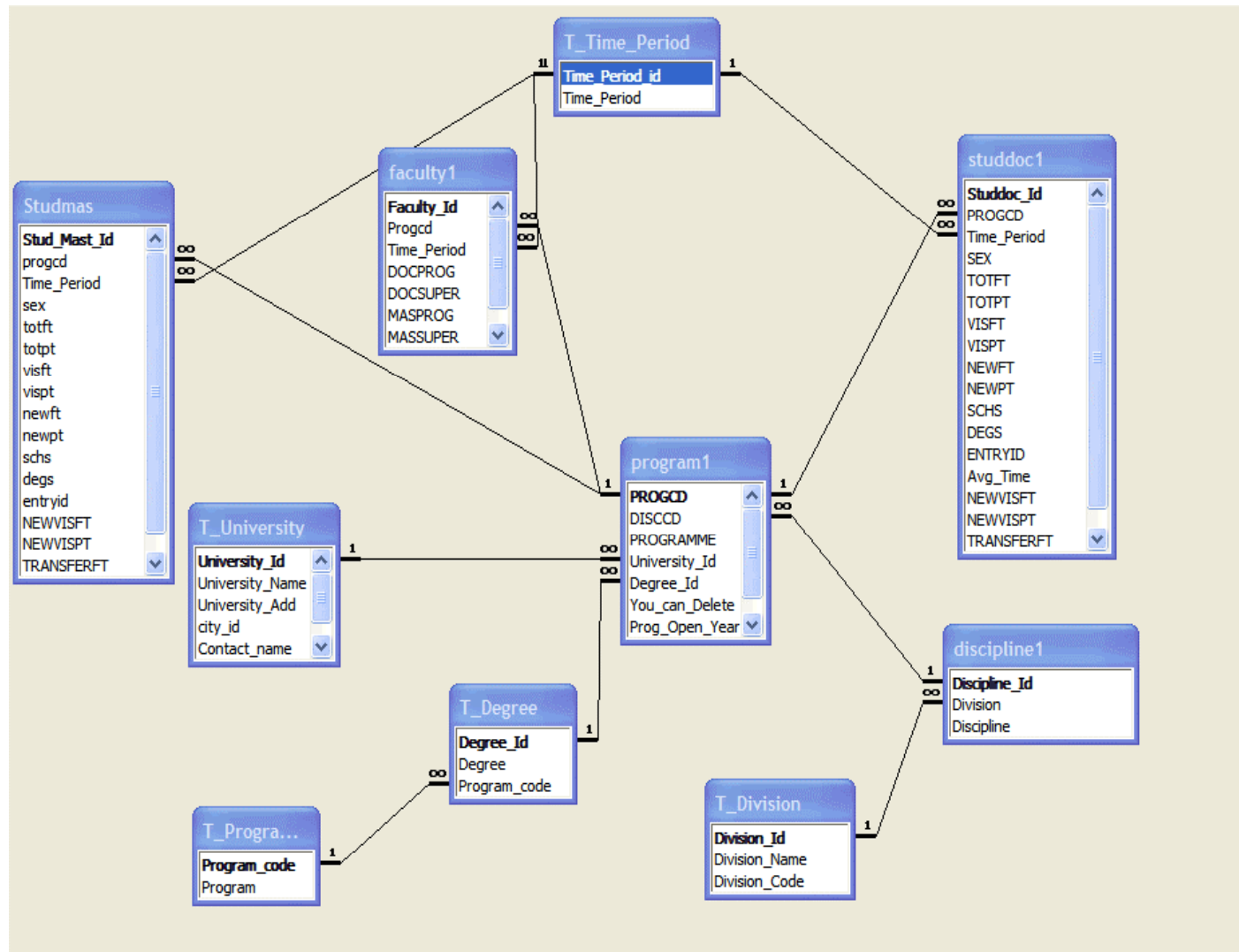
How effective has the OCGS QA process been in implementing the twin objectives (among many others) of:

- reducing times-to-completion, and
- raising graduation rates in the Ontario university system?

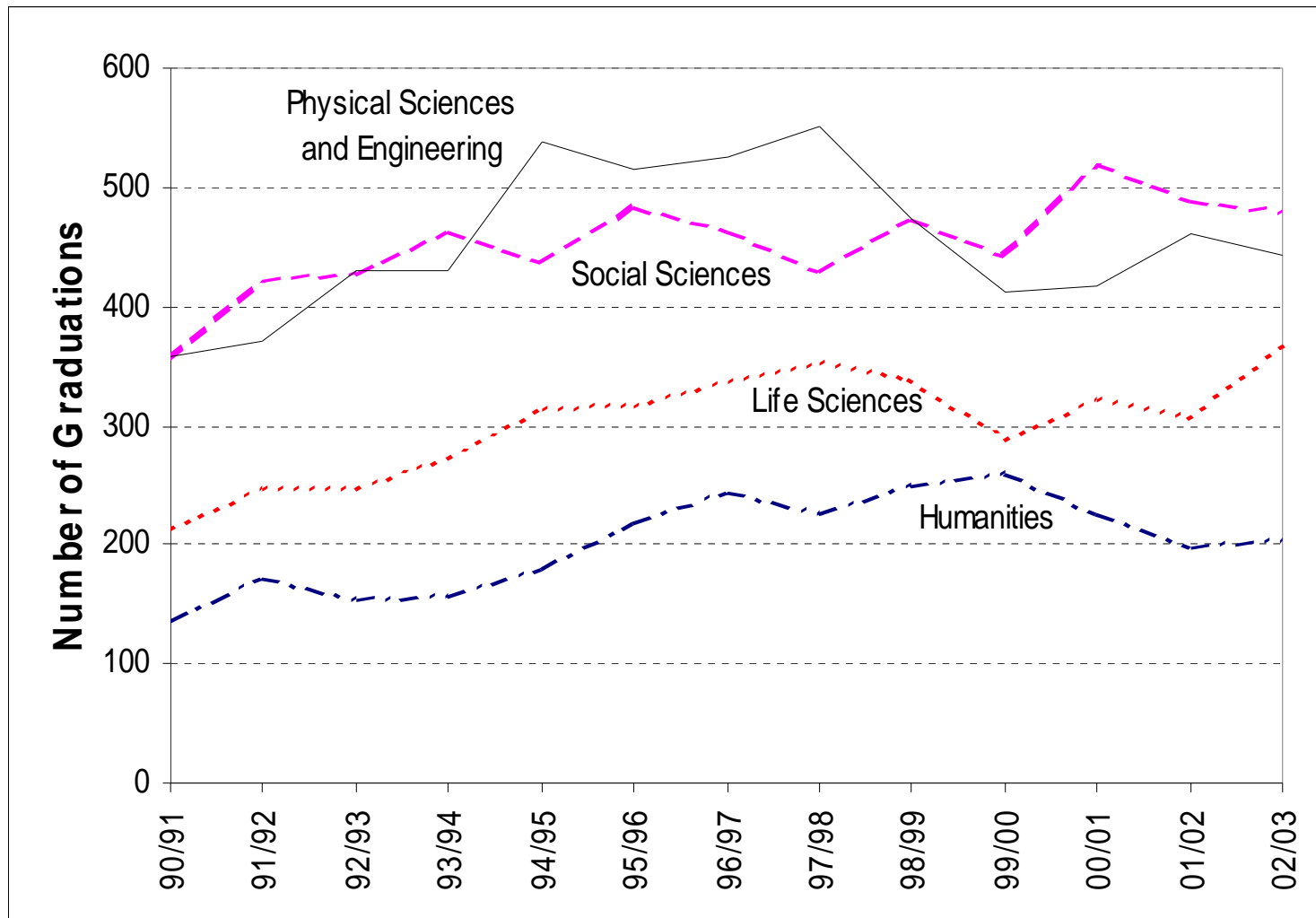
# **Factors Determining Graduation Rates and Median (or Average) Time-to-Completion (Nerad and Cerny, 1992)**

- Research mode
- Structure of program – delicate topic in the humanities
- Dissertation definition
- Advising
- Departmental climate
- Financial support – minimum guaranteed funding
- Research money
- Campus facilities
- Job market

# OCGS Macroindicator Data: structure of relational database



# Graduations from Doctoral Programs in Ontario, 1990-2003

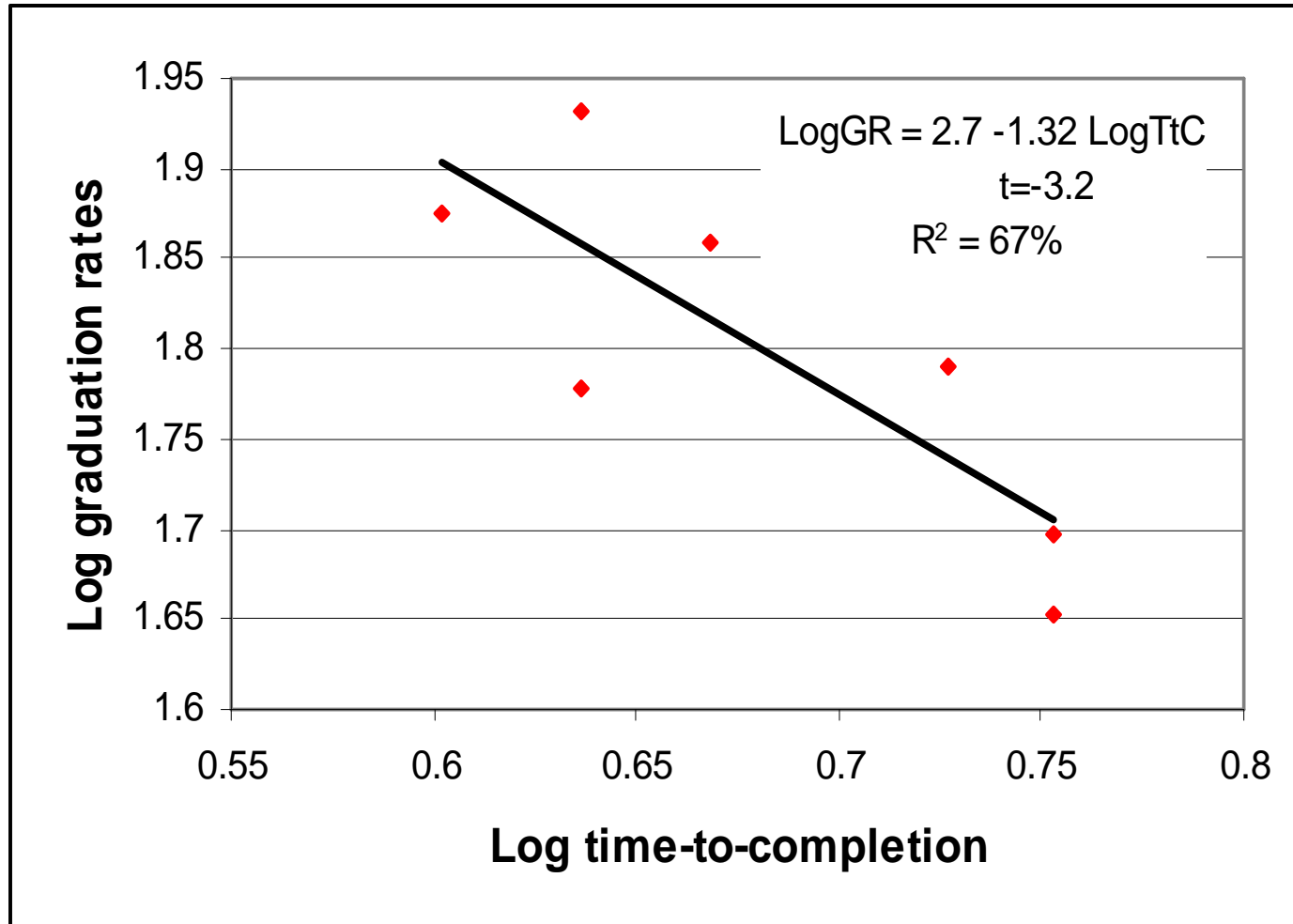


# The Conceptual basis of the Macroindicator Data

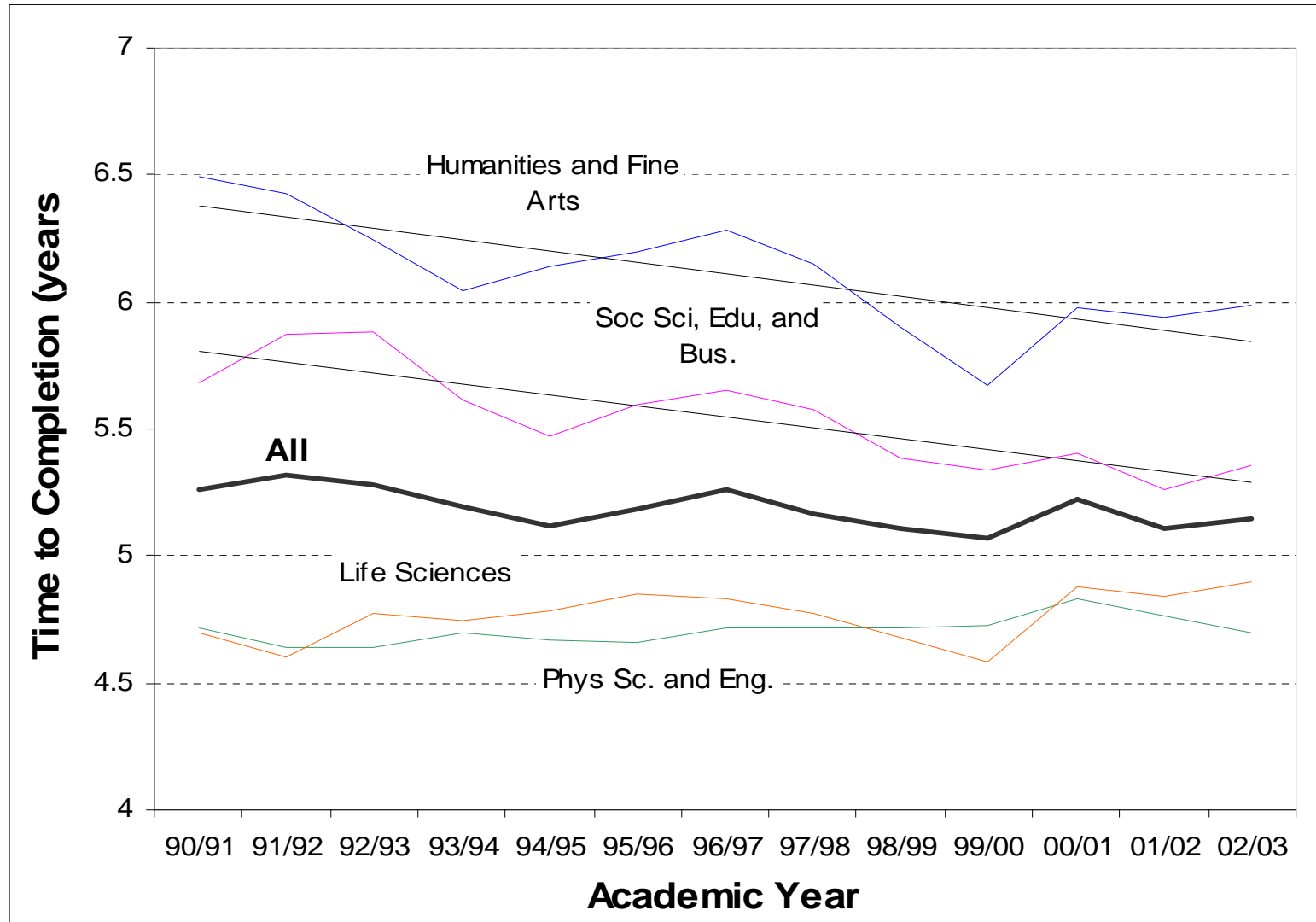
The number of graduations (#G) in program  $i$  in time  $t$  should be equal to the new enrolment entering the program (NE) in some earlier **time-frame**  $n$ , modified by the graduation rate in program  $i$ . ie.

$$\#G_i = (NE_{t-n})_i * (GR_{t-n})_i$$

# The Relationship Between Graduation Rates and Times-to-Completion



# Trends in Weighted Doctoral Time-to-Completion 'Means' in Major Discipline Groups: Ontario, 1990-2003



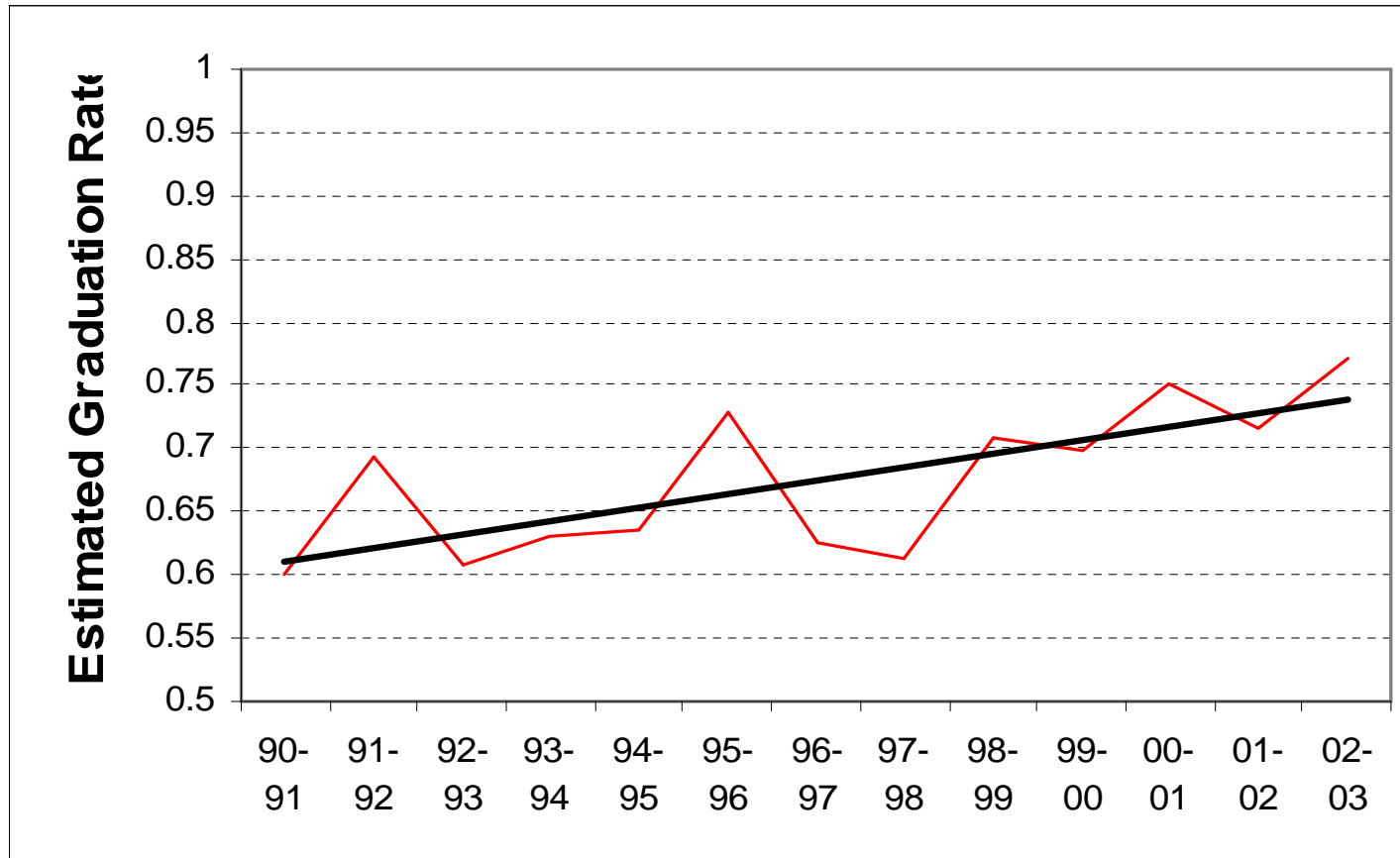
# Difficulties Estimating the GR

$$\text{with } (GR_{t-n})_i = \#G_i / (NE_{t-n})_i$$

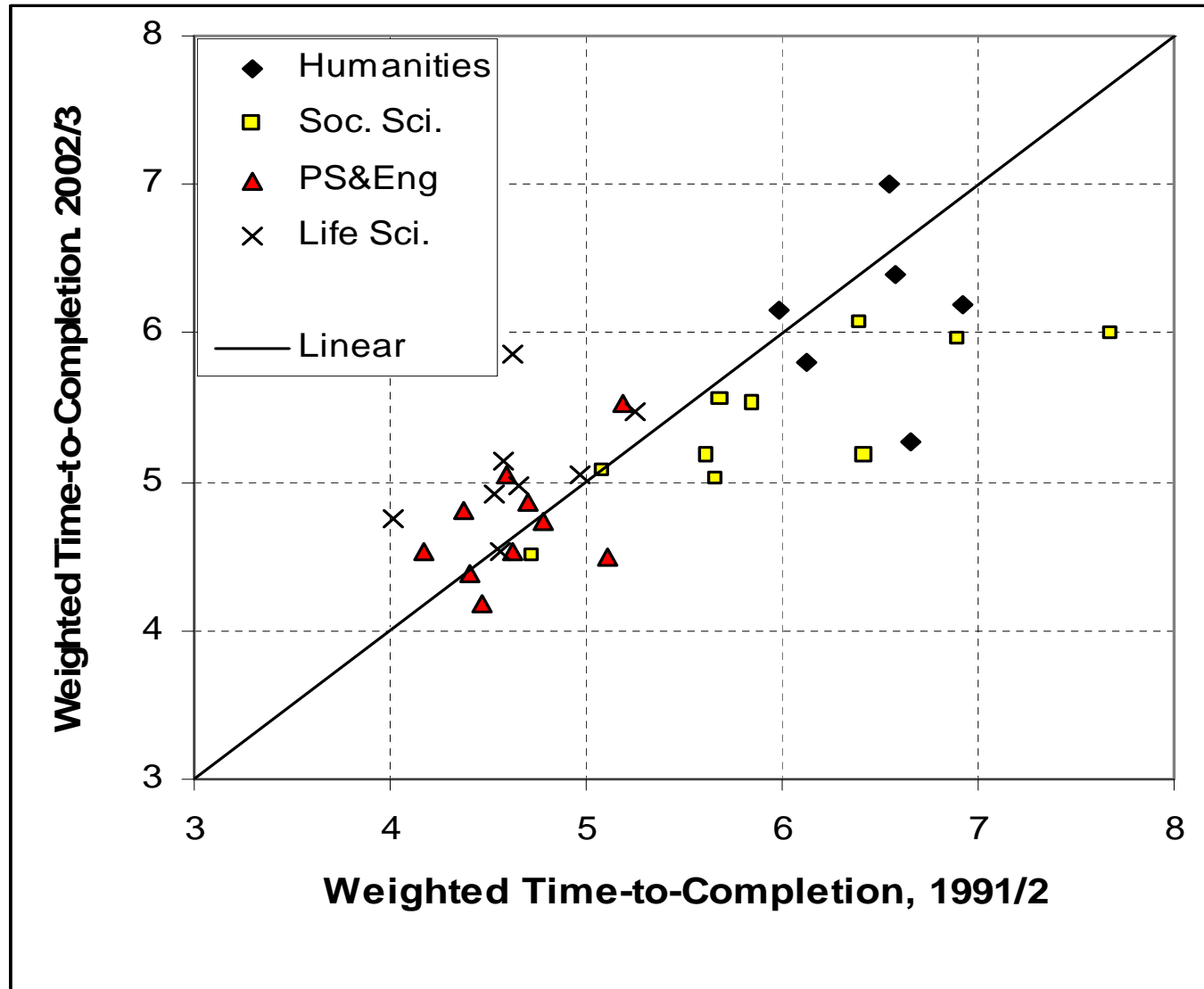
and,  $n$  defined as the weighted time-to-completion ‘means’ for each major discipline group,

- it should be possible to estimate graduation rates for each discipline, sub-group, and major group.
- But, it is not possible for the sciences (due to in-program transfers from the masters to the doctoral level)
- It may be possible for the humanities and social sciences where there are fewer in-program transfers.

# Trend in Graduation Rates for the Humanities and Social Sciences: Ontario, 1990 – 2003.



# Variation in Change in Times-to-Completion, by Discipline



## Conclusion: how effective has the OCGS QA process been?

- the process has been reasonably effective in the areas most in need of encouragement.
- in the humanities and social sciences ‘mean’ times-to-completion have decreased by about six months, and graduation rates increased by about twelve percentage points since 1992.
- whether such changes are sufficient, or would have occurred in the absence of such a process, or have occurred simply as a result of changes in tuition fee policies, are, of course, moot points.