Concept and Methodology of Tracer Studies – International Experiences

Contribution to the Workshop
"Graduates on the Labour Market. Questionnaire Development at the National Level" in Sinaia, June 2-4 2010

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Overview

1. Institutional Background – who is INCHER?
2. Theoretical Framework
3. Methodology of Tracer Studies
4. The New GRADNET Approach: Network of Graduate Surveys
5. Conclusion

1. Institutional Background – who is INCHER?

4 University City Kassel: in the Heart of Germany, in the State of Hesse

- Located in the center of Germany and Europe
- Unique unity of urban culture and landscape
- City of the documenta
- Parks and recreational areas
- Center for industry, services and civil administration of nothern Hesse

University of Kassel

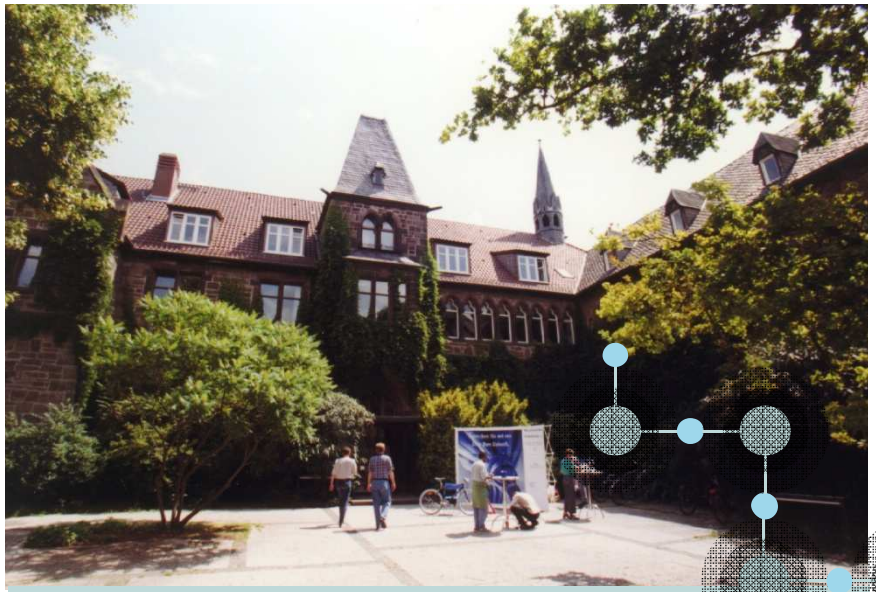
- Location: in the centre of Germany and Europe (200 Km to Frankfurt = 1.5 hours by train)
- City of Kassel: 200,000 habitants
- University of Kassel
  - 18,000 students
  - 2,000 graduates per year
  - Broad study programs

6 Campus Holländischer Platz - 1986

Holländischer Platz

Humanities, Social Science, Economics, Architecture, City Planning and Landscape Planning, Civil and Mechanical Engineering

Campus Witzenhausen - 1886



Witzenhausen

Ecological Agriculture

INCHER-Kassel

- International Centre of Higher Education Research (INCHER-Kassel)
- The centre is 32 years old
- Research Centre of the University of Kassel
- About 20-30 researchers
- About 15 doctoral students
- Study programme: Master of Higher Education
- Research focus: Higher education and work; HE systems and structures; (international) graduate surveys (CHEERS; REFLEX; PROFLEX; HEGESCO)
- International network of graduate surveys

INCHER
www.uni-kassel.de/incher

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UNIKASSEL VERSITÄT

INCHER-KASSEL
Internationales Zentrum für Hochschulforschung Kassel

INCHER-KASSEL

- Research
- Members/staff
- Master Programme
- Research Library
- Events
- Publications

LINKS

- University of Kassel
- Fachbereich 05
- Network for Grad. Surveys
- Gesellschaft f. Hochschulforschung

Internationales Zentrum für Hochschulforschung - Kassel
There are no translations available

NEWLY PUBLISHED

BRENNAN, John; TEICHLER, Ulrich (eds.) (2008): The Future of Higher Education and the Future of Higher Education Research. In: *Higher Education*, 56(3)(Special Issue; September 2008). Dordrecht: Springer.

September 2008: A special issue of Higher Education edited by John Brennan and Ulrich Teichler draws on the results of the „higher education looking forward" (HELF) project with five articles and a concluding article which attempts to synthesise and to set out a future long-term research agenda. All articles address scientific questions of long term strategic concern to the future of higher education.

The HELF project aimed at developing future scenarios of developments in higher education that might help to identify priorities for higher education resaearch. The project was coordinated by John Brennan (London) and supported by the European

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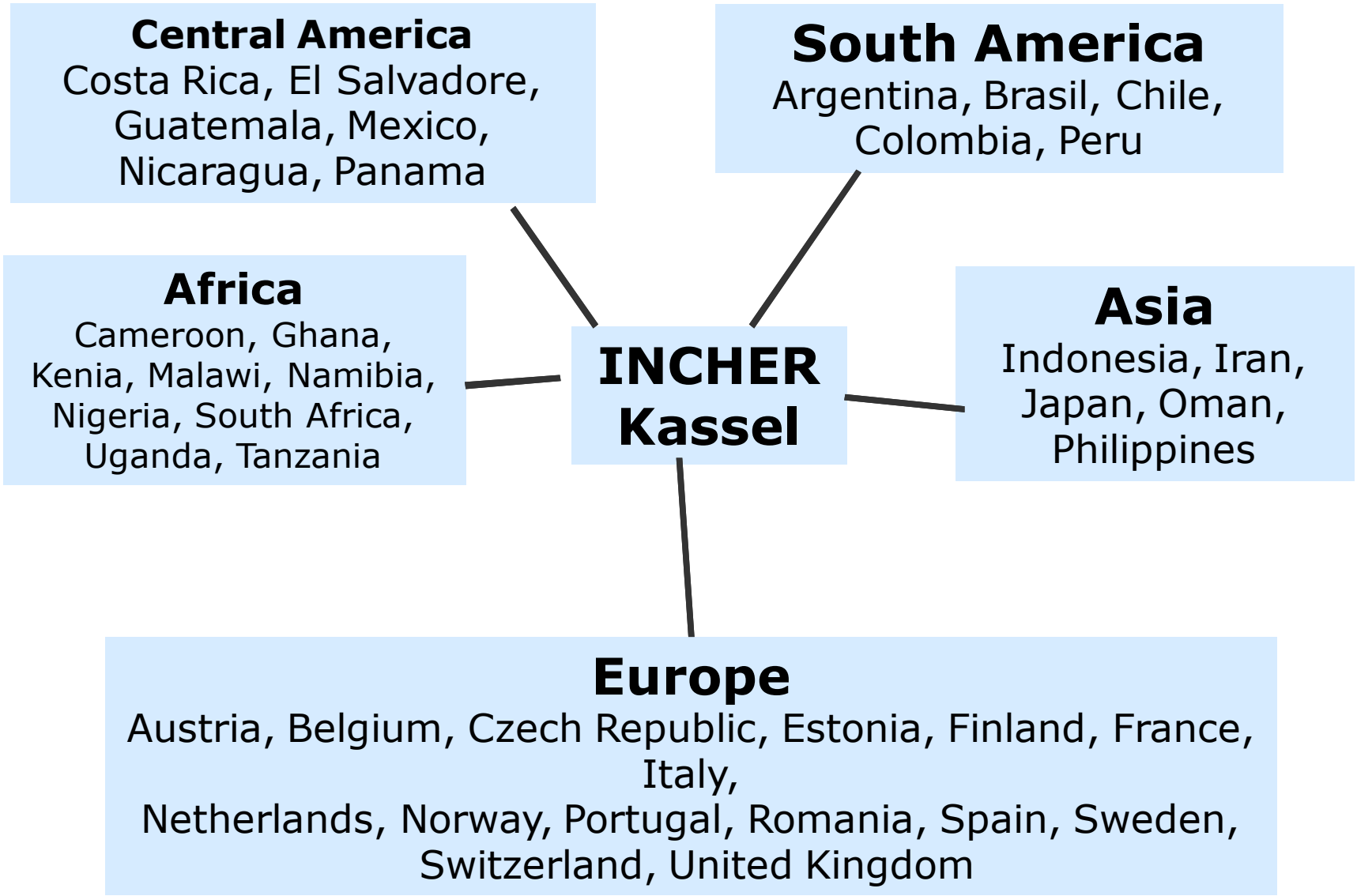
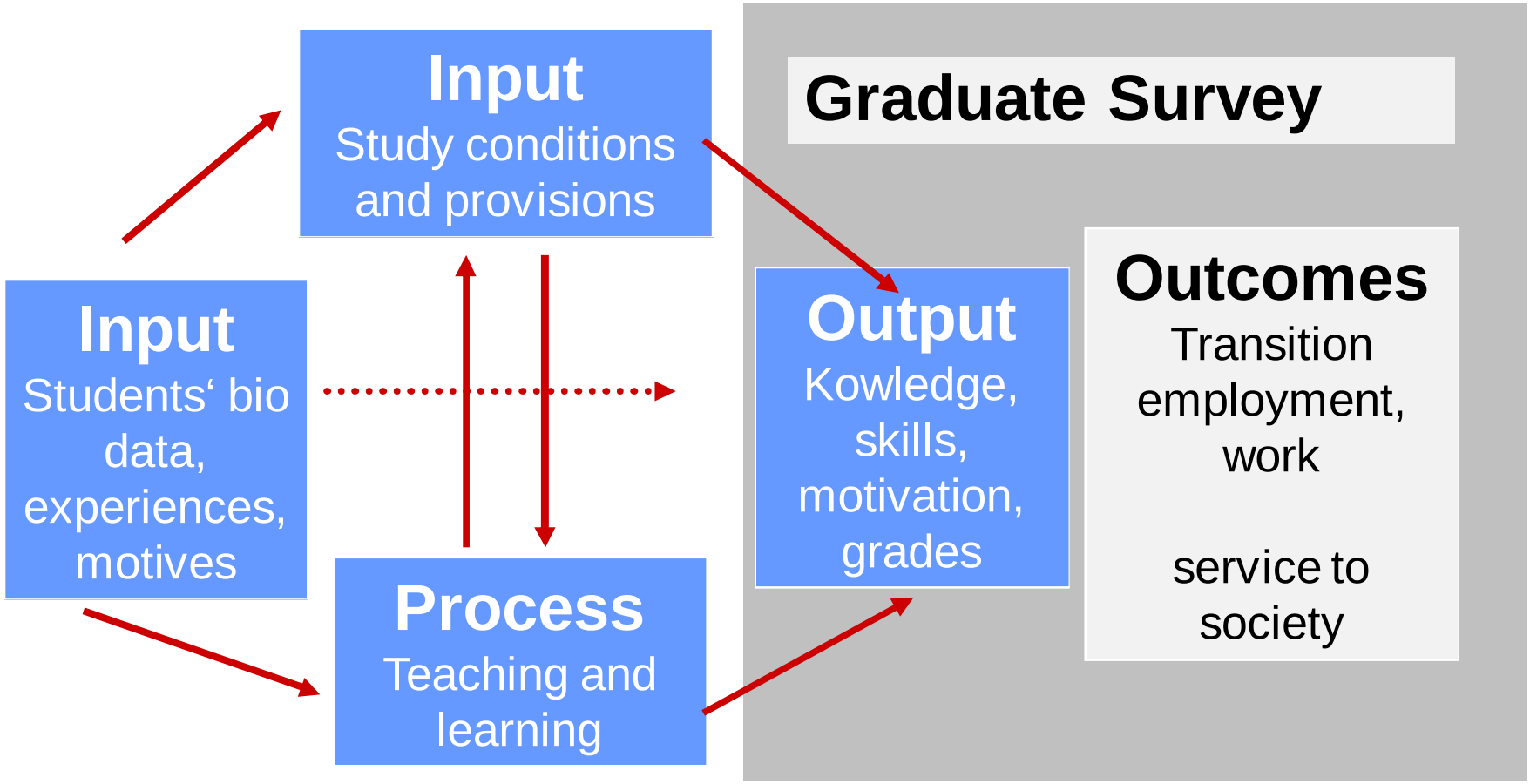
INCHER-KASSEL Internationales Zentrum für Hochschulforschung Kassel

International Tracer Study Cooperation

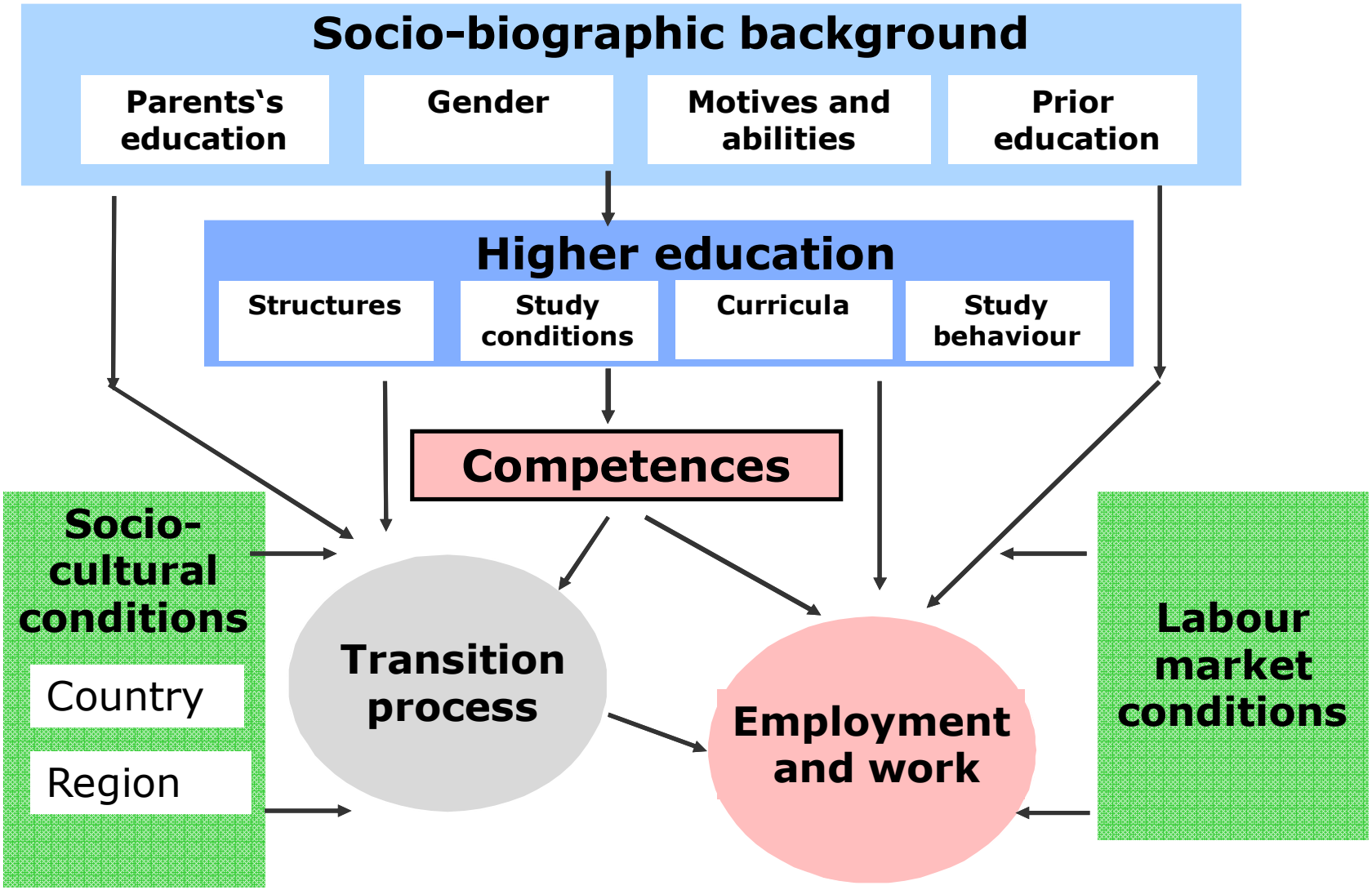


2 Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Framework for Graduate Surveys



Context: Labour market – Region – Country; Socio-economic development and personal development


Socio-biographic background
Parents's education
Gender
Motives and abilities
Prior education
Higher education
Structures
Study conditions
Curricula
Study behaviour
Competences
Socio-cultural conditions
Country
Region
Transition process
Employment and work
Labour market conditions
Knowledge society
Globalisation, internationalisation
Life course

Key Theoretical Problems: Causal Relevance of Study Programs

1. Which indicators do we need? (search duration, employment status, income, position, level match, field of study match, work autonomy, job satisfaction, etc.)
2. How to measure the labour market signals?
3. Which factors are relevant to explain the success of the graduates besides higher education? (labour market, regional mobility, individual motivation, etc.
4. To what extent is the professional success/career caused by HE?
5. Which elements of HE (study conditions and provisions, etc) have an impact?

3. Methodology of Tracer Studies

What are (Graduate) Tracer Studies?

- Similar terms
  - Graduate survey (40,700 Google hits)
  - Tracer study (98,000 Google hits)
  - Alumni research (U.S.; 99,000 hits)
  - Follow-up study (graduates) (179.000 hits)
  - Graduate career tracking (Hungary; 6 hits)
- Target population
  - *Graduates* of an institution of higher education (regardless the kind of degree)
  - Surveyed *after* graduation

Typical Objectives of Institutional Graduate Surveys (Tracer Studies)

1. To get valueable **information** for the **development** of the university

2. To evaluate the **relevance** of higher education

Data from graduates

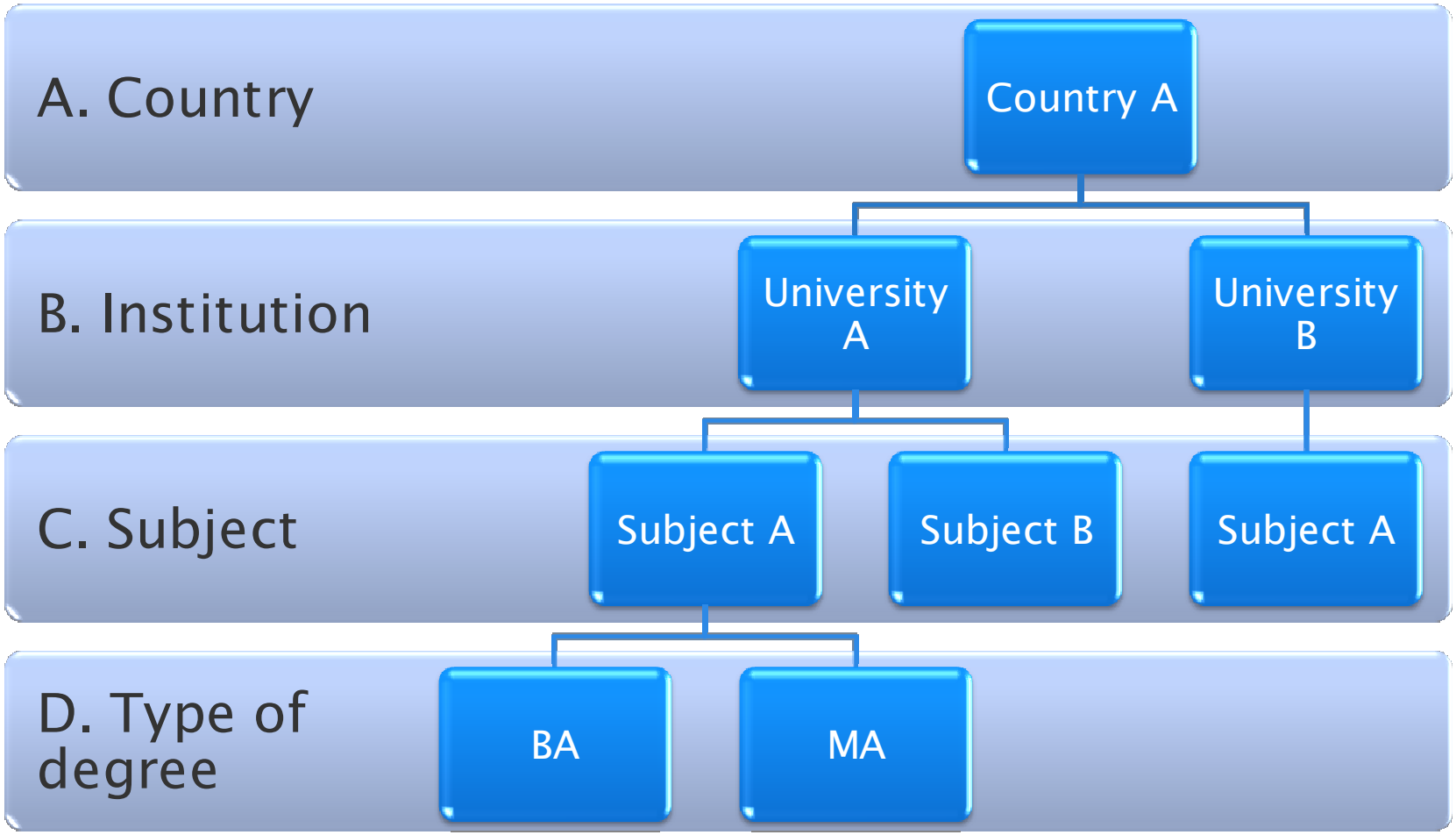
3. To contribute to the **accreditation** process

4. To **inform** students, parents, lecturers and administrators

Different Design of Graduate Surveys

Examples	Time after graduation	Cohorts	Length of questionnaire
United Kingdom	Six months	One	Short (one page)
Costa Rica (CONARE)	One year after	One	Medium (10 pages)
Europe	One to ten years after	One or different	Medium to long (10-20 pages)

Scope of Graduate Tracer Studies and Target Population



Objectives of Institutional Graduate Surveys in Germany

- Multi-functional surveys with broad focus
  - Employment, labour market signals, professional success
  - Competences and work
  - Retrospective rating/evaluation of study
  - Curricular development
  - Continuing education (marketing)
  - Networking, alumni databank
  - Evaluation – quality assurance – accreditation
- Multi-institutional surveys
  - Benchmarking
  - Comparison with relevant others – not with the average

Multifunctional survey – the Netherlands

- Quality assurance (and increasingly accreditation)
- Alumni-tracking
- National monitoring of transition from higher education to work
- Study choice information for school-leavers (both at national and institution level)
- Input for labour market forecasting
- Scientific and policy analyses

Source: Jim Allen (ROA, University of Maastricht, Netherlands), Kassel 2008

Multifunctional survey - Switzerland

- information for political authorities (education/employment sectors)
- benchmarking (System of indicators of Swiss higher education institutes)
- evaluation and information tool for higher education institutes
- information for career/study counselling services

Source: Andrea Witmer (Swiss Federal Statistical Office), Kassel 2008

Graduate Survey Systems in Europe (1) (2009)

	Regular national surveys	Institutional surveys
Germany, France, Italy	Yes	Frequent
United Kingdom	Yes	Seldom
Netherlands, Norway. Switzerland	Yes	Seldom
Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria	No	Seldom
Finland, Sweden	No	Frequent
Poland, (Hungary), Estonia, Romania, Czech Republic, etc.	No	Seldom

Graduate Survey Systems in Europe (2)

	Panel	Multifunctional survey	University specific questionnaire
Germany	Yes	Yes	**Yes**
France	No	(Yes)	No
Italy	Yes	Yes	No
United Kingdom	Yes	No	No
Netherlands	No	Yes	No
Norway	Yes	Yes	No
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	**(Yes)**

4. The New GRADNET Approach: Network of Graduate Surveys

The Tracer Study Revolution in Germany

- Until 2007: only a few institutions of HE conducted regular tracer studies
- 2008/2009 almost all relevant institutions of HE are partners in different regional or national systems of regular tracer studies
- Coverage: about 80% of all graduates in Germany

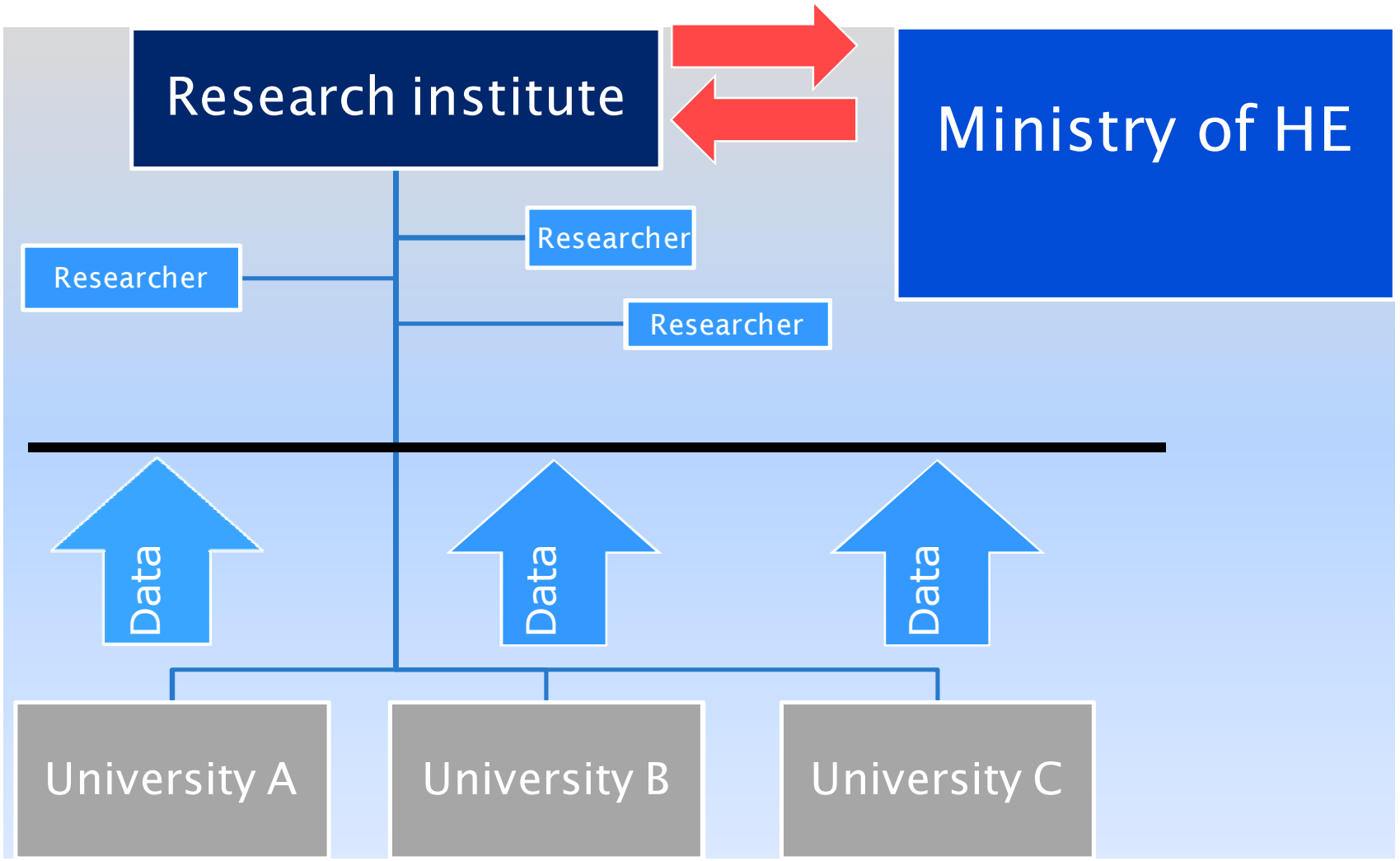
Kind of Graduate Surveys in Germany until 2007

- International Surveys: INCHER-Kassel (CHEERS and REFLEX)
- Regular nationwide surveys: HIS (Higher Educattion Information Centre)
- Ranking of HE institutions, selected fields of study: CHE (Centre for Higher Education Development)
- Regional surveys: Bavaria
- Regular surveys of single institutions: seldom
  - TU Dresden, Uni Rostock
  - FH Wiesbaden, FH Aachen
- Ad hoc surveys of single faculties/institutions: frequent

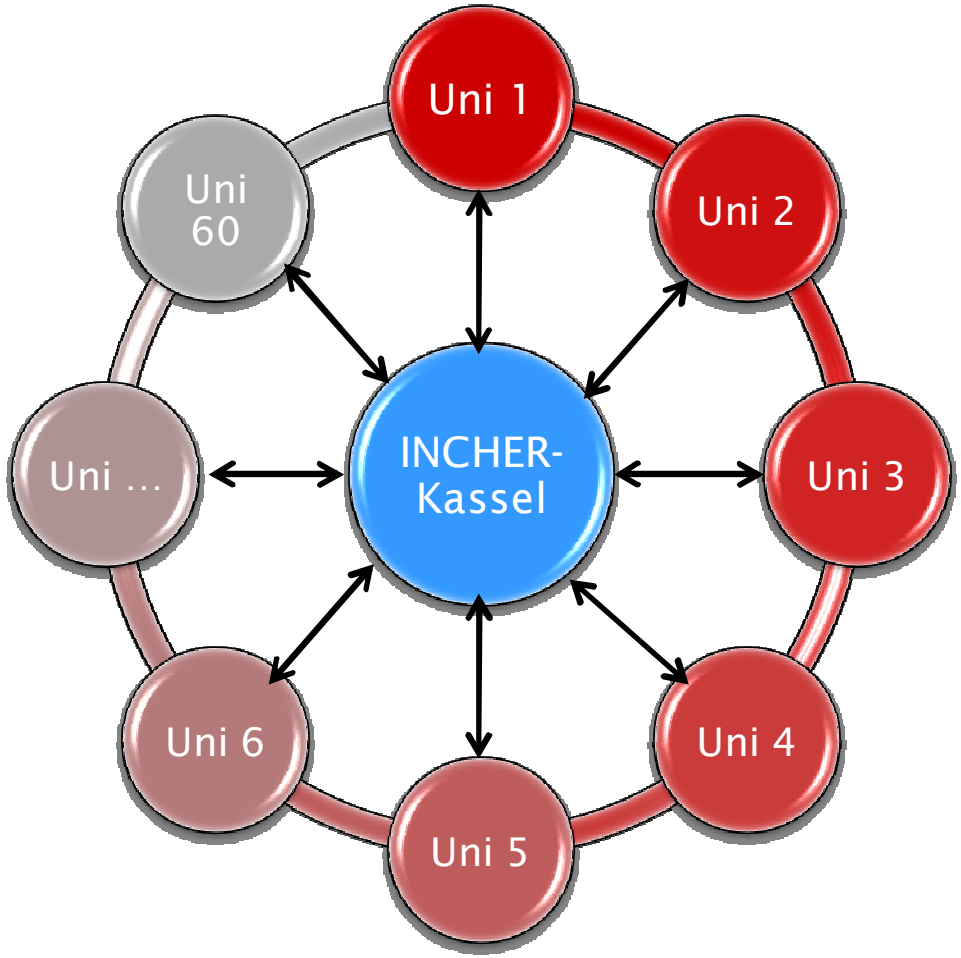
The Nationwide HIS Surveys

- Every forth cohort (1989, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009)
- Only first degree
- Paneldesign
  - First wave: about 12 months after graduation
  - Second wave: about 5 years after graduation
- Sample: About 12,000 graduates in first wave
- Paper questionnaire
- No comparisons between single HE institutions

The Classical Approach: die University Delivers Data (e.g. Addresses)



The German Network Approach

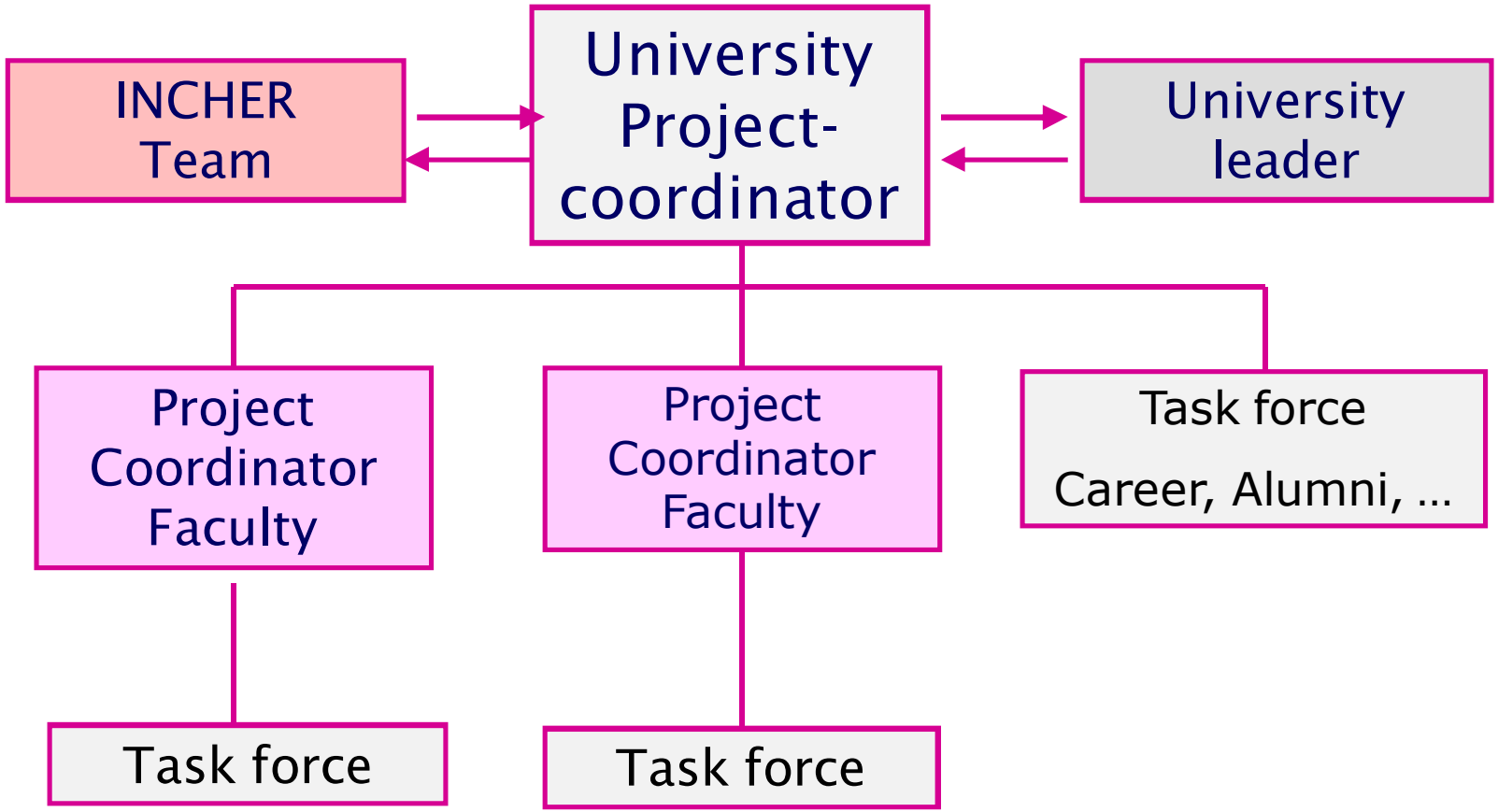


2010: About 60 institutions of HE in Germany are cooperating in conducting regular graduate tracer studies

Key Aspects of Cooperation

- Universities and INCHER-Kassel are developing the core questionnaire together
- Every university has an own questionnaire – INCHER gives advice
- Central data processing – joint data base
- Every university gets customized table reports (about 500 pages)
- Benchmarking according the needs of the universities

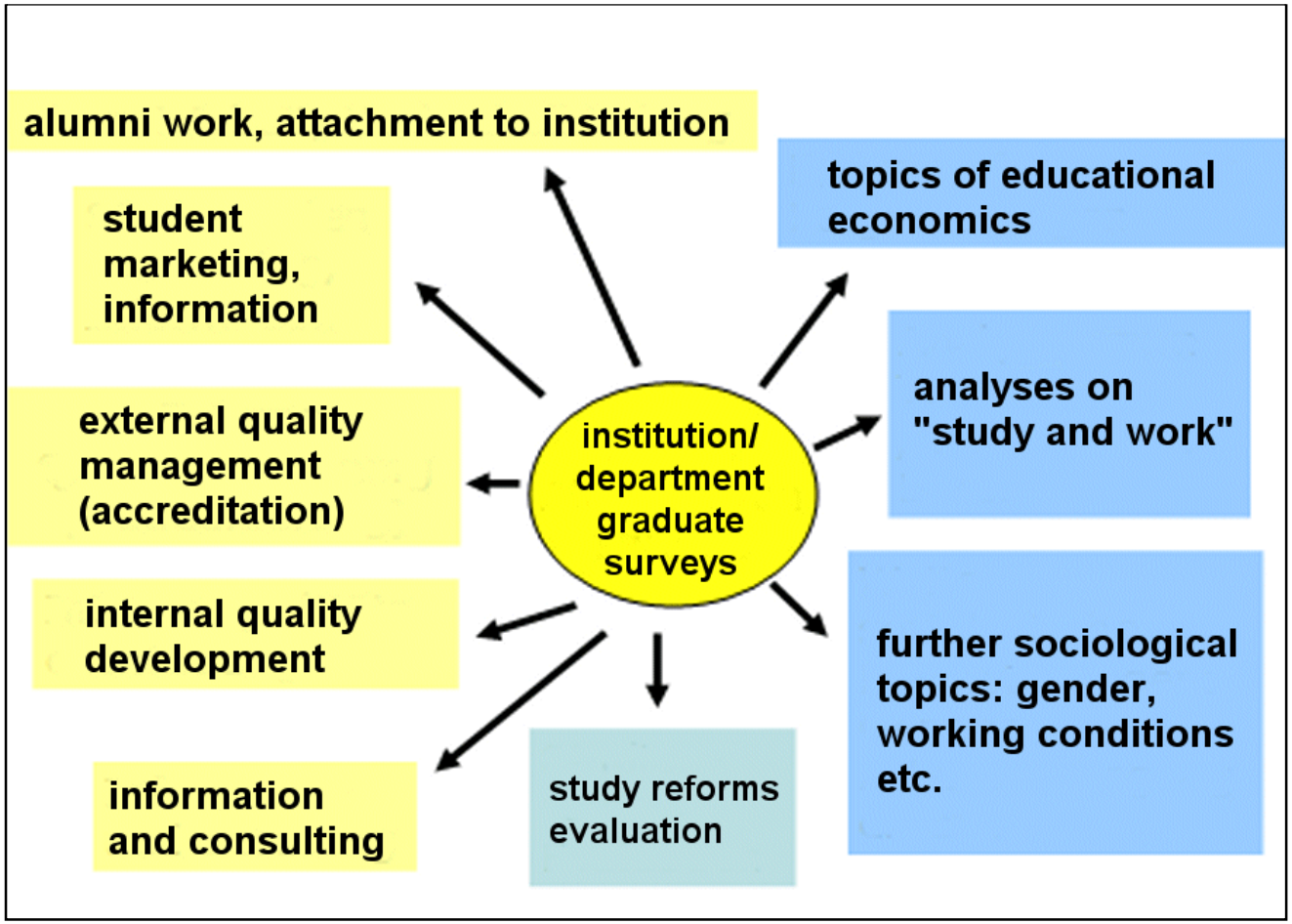
Organisation of GRADNET at University Level



The German Graduate Survey Network Project

Project-coordinators from 35 universities and fachhochschulen during a workshop in Kassel; Sept. 2008

The Bridge Concept – HE Research and Application



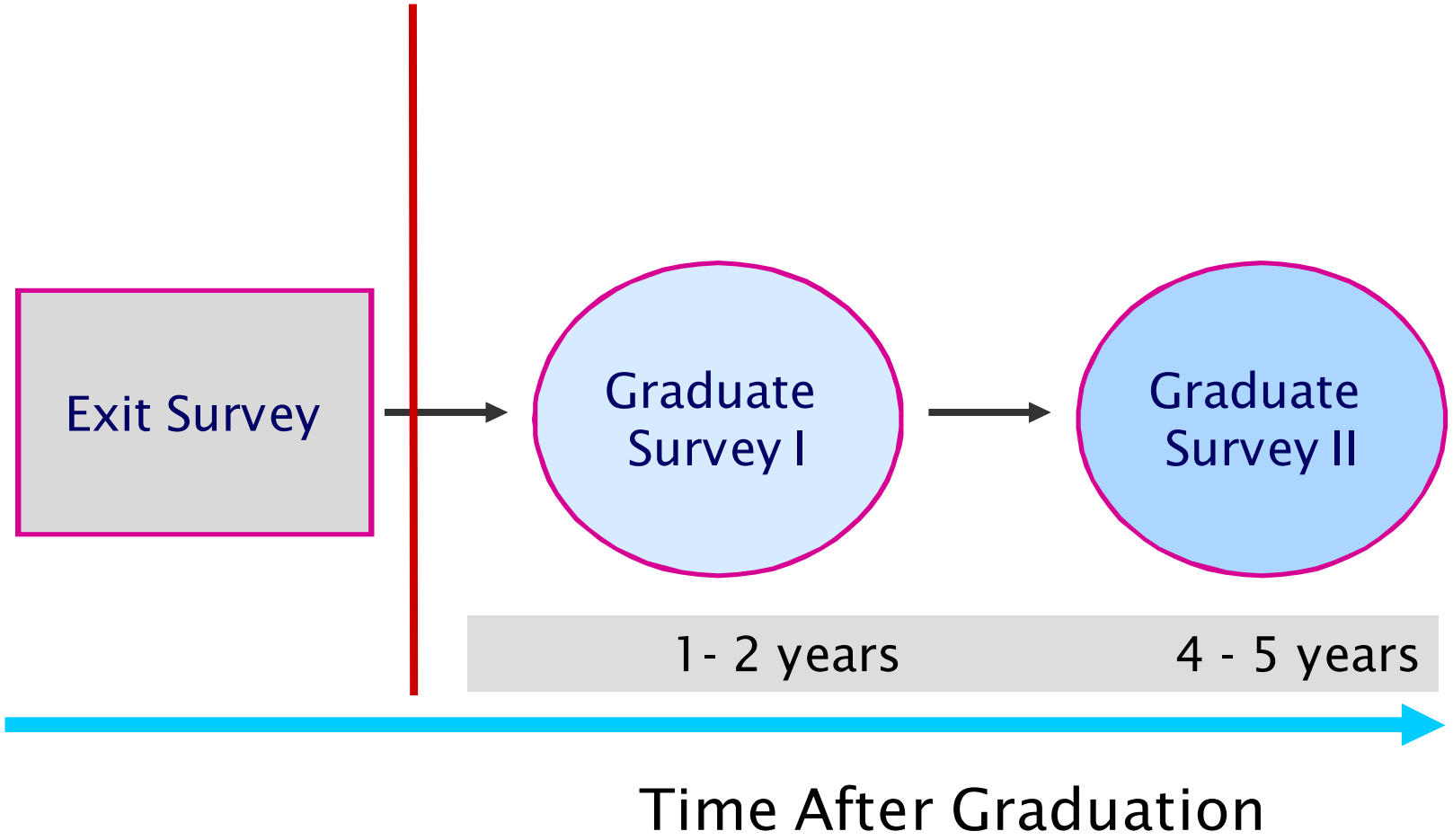
GRADNET: Network of Graduate Surveys

- Established 2006 by INCHER-Kassel
- 2008: about 250 members
- German language
- Individual membership (email list)
- Two conferences per year
- Professionalistion of tracer study researchers
- Core group
- Initiative for the RESEARCH PROJECT „Study Conditions and Professional Success“

Background: New Challenges

- Growing competition of HE institutions
- Growing international competition
- New study structure (Bologna process)
- „Employability“
- Evaluation and Accreditation („Accountability“; “outcome assessment”)
- Growing service demand from students
- New HE management philosophy – quality management

(Future) Design of Graduate Surveys



New Survey System in Germany: the GRADNET SURVEYS (INCHER)

Year of graduation	Year of Graduate Survey				
	2007/2008 Dec.-March	2008/2009 Oct.-Feb.	2009/2010 Oct.-Feb.	2010 Oct.-Dec	2011
2006 (9 HE institutions, 15,000 graduates)	1.5 years after graduation (done)	Panel →		4.5 years after graduation	
2007 (48 HE institutions; 80,000 graduates)		1.5 years after graduation (done)	Panel →		4.5 years after graduation
2008 (46 HE institutions; 75,000 graduates)			1.5 years after graduation (running)	Panel →	

The GRADNET HE Institutions (Jan. 2010)

1. Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg	27. Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen
2. Bauhaus-Universität Weimar	28. Leibniz Universität Hannover
3. Bergische Universität Wuppertal	29. Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg
4. Beuth Hochschule für Technik Berlin*	30. Merz Akademie für Gestaltung Stuttgart
5. Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus	31. Philipps-Universität Marburg
6. Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel*	32. Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule (RWTH) Aachen
7. Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen	33. Ruhr-Universität Bochum
8. Fachhochschule Aachen	34. Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg
9. Fachhochschule Braunschweig/ Wolfenbüttel	35. Technische Universität Berlin*
10. Fachhochschule Dortmund	36. Technische Universität Darmstadt
11. Fachhochschule Erfurt	37. Technische Universität Dortmund
12. Fachhochschule Frankfurt am Main	38. Technische Universität Ilmenau
13. Fachhochschule für Ökonomie und Management Essen	39. Universität Bremen
14. Fachhochschule für Wirtschaft und Recht Berlin	40. Universität der Künste Berlin
15. Freie Universität Berlin	41. Universität Hamburg
16. Fachhochschule Wiesbaden	42. Universität Karlsruhe (TH)
17. Georg-August-Universität Göttingen	43. Universität Kassel
18. Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf	44. Universität Konstanz
19. Hochschule Anhalt	45. Universität Osnabrück
20. Hochschule Bremerhaven	46. Universität Paderborn
21. Hochschule Fulda	47. Universität Rostock
22. Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig	48. Universität Siegen
23. Hochschule Offenburg	49. Universität Stuttgart*
24. Hochschule Vechta	50. Universität Ulm
25. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin	51. Universität zu Köln
26. Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main	52. Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster

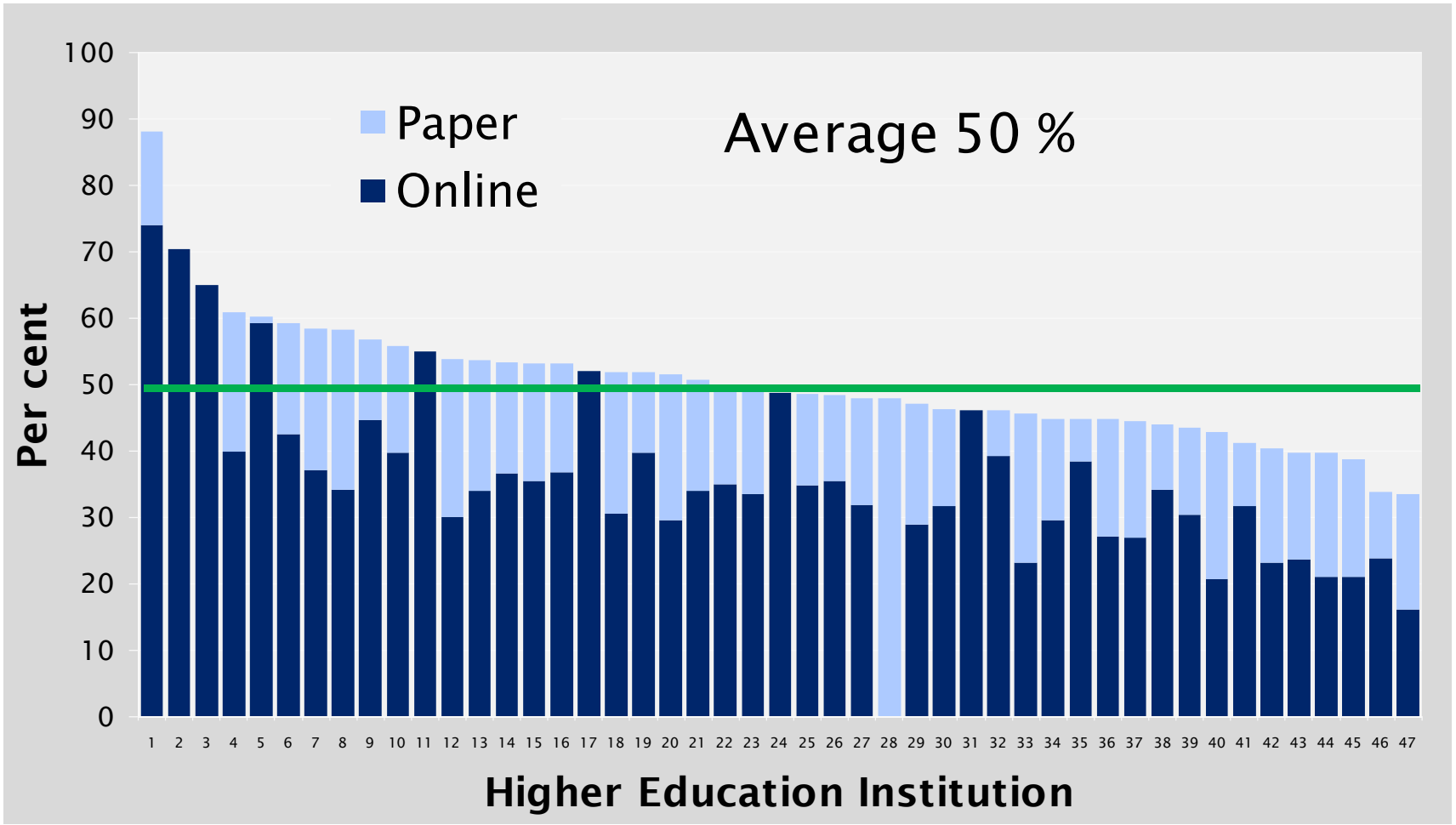
* Did not participate in the 2009 survey

Design and Conduction of the GRADNET Surveys 2008-2010

	Pilot 2008	Survey 2009	Survey 2010
Cohort of graduates (year of graduation)	2006	2007	2008
Field phase	Dec. 2007 – March 2008	Oct. 2008 - Jan. 2009	Oct. 2009 - Jan. 2010
Number of participating institutions of higher education	9	48	46
Used addresses	15.200	86.800	76.000
Valid addresses	12.800	75.000	70.000
Responses	**6.300**	**37.500**	**33.000**
Response rate	**49%**	**50%**	**50%**

INCHER-Kassel: German Graduate Surveys Network Project (GRADNET); survey 2009; cohort 2007, 1.5 years after graduation

Response Rate of the Survey 2009, by Higher Education Institution (%)



Quelle: INCHER, KOAB Absolventenbefragung 2009; Jg. 2007

Cooperation for development

- Every university has an individual questionnaire (2009: 160 surveys were administrated at the same time by INCHER-Kassel)
- Every university has a project coordinator
- At least 6 training workshops per survey
- Every university received the cleaned data and ready to print table reports of about 500 pages
- Many universities published the results in the internet
- A lot of internal and external dissemination activities
- 2009 survey: dataset with 36,000 graduates

Implementation of the German Network Approach

- Address database of the HE institution
- Update of addresses by HE institution
- Four contacts/send outs
- Contacts by letters and/or email
- Combination of paper and online questionnaire
- Response rate should be about 50%

Selected Results of the German GRADNET Survey 2009 (participants: 36,000 graduates)

1. Successful cooperation for development among 50 HE institutions in Germany
2. Graduates of the year 2007: optimal labour market conditions in Germany – a success story
3. Negative scenarios do not find empirical support – no trend towards a „Generation Trainees“
4. Differences by field of study are less important
5. Remarkable good employment conditions for Bachelor graduates
6. Growing relevance of soft skills
7. Reputation of the HE institution seems to be not important
8. BA graduates have not less international experiences
9. Transition to first job depends on own initiatives
10. Master – the winners of the Bologna process

5. Conclusion

Status of Research on Causal Relevance of Higher Education

- How college affects students? (Pascarella/Terrenzini, most compehensive synthesis report, 2005)
  - Little evidence
  - Little net effects of programme quality
- Still in search of usable knowledge (Peter Ewell, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS))

Many Open Questions

- How to measure study conditions and study provisions
  - Does program quality matters for employment outcomes?
- Which student characteristics must be controlled?
- What are the best indicators of employment outcome and professional success?
- How to conduct surveys efficiently with high quality? What are the standards for quality?
- How should the data be analyzed to gain usable knowledge?

Outlook

- The success of cooperation should be established on an international level
  (European Higher Education Area - The Bologna Process – 46 countries)
- (International) exchange of concepts and experiences
  INCHER cooperates with Indonesia, Oman, Romania, and many other countries
- (International) cooperation between universities → International data base
- International network
- International projects

Further information

- http://www.uni-kassel.de/incher/absolvent
  - The German Graduate Survey Network
- http://www.his.de
  - The HIS Graduate Surveys
- http:// http://www.ihf.bayern.de
  - The Bavarian Graduate Panel Survey

THANK YOU