

# Graduate Surveys in Germany as a Tool to Measure and Improve the Relevance of Higher Education

Contribution to the International Seminar  
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# Overview

- ❑ General approach: the relevance of context information
- ❑ Graduate surveys in Germany
- ❑ The new approach in Germany: cooperation of universities
- ❑ Conclusion

### 3 INCHER-Kassel

## International Centre for Higher Education Research

- ❑ Research institute at the University of Kassel, Germany
- ❑ 10-15 researchers; higher education and work is a key research area
- ❑ 30 years of research experiences
- ❑ National and international graduate surveys (e.g. CHEERS with 12 countries)
- ❑ Workshops/training of university staff members in Latin America, Africa, Asia

# What are TRACER Studies?

## □ Similar terms

- Graduate survey
- Alumni research
- Follow-up study

## □ Target population

- Graduates of an institution of higher education
- Asked some months/years after graduation

# Worldwide: Growing Interest on Labour Market Information

- ❑ Paradigm shift: Universities are more market oriented – customer satisfaction
- ❑ Innovative role – growing relevance for the knowledge society
- ❑ Mass higher education as a private investment – justification of costs
- ❑ Rapid change – expansion of higher education
- ❑ Quality assurance – accreditation – evaluation - excellence

# Key Objectives of Tracer Studies

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

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

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graph TD; A[1. To get relevant information for the development of the university] --> D((Data from graduates)); B[2. To evaluate the relevance of higher education] --> D; C[3. To contribute to the accreditation process] --> D; E[4. To inform students, parents, lecturers and administrators] --> D;
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Data from graduates

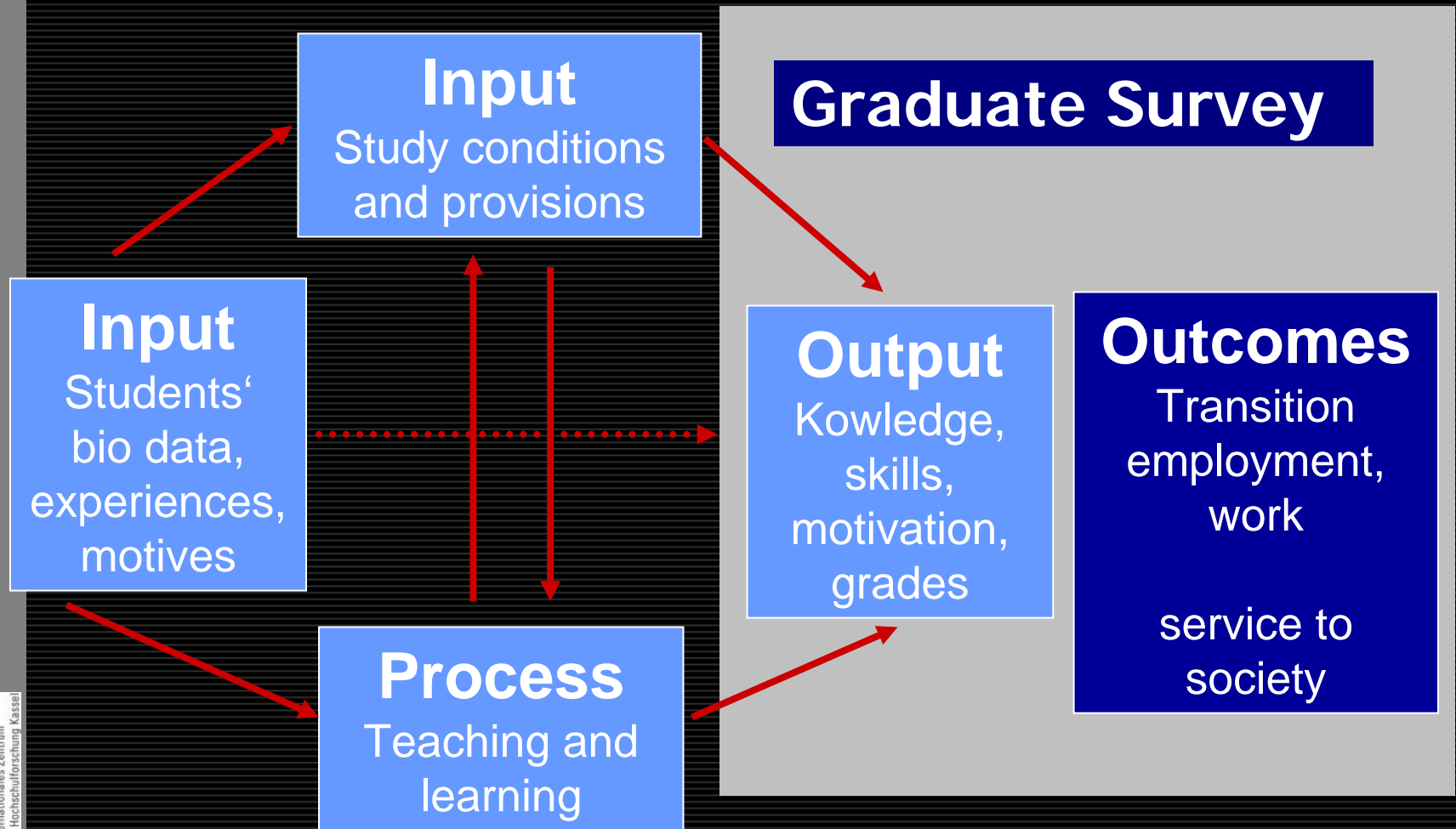
3. To contribute to the **accreditation** process

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

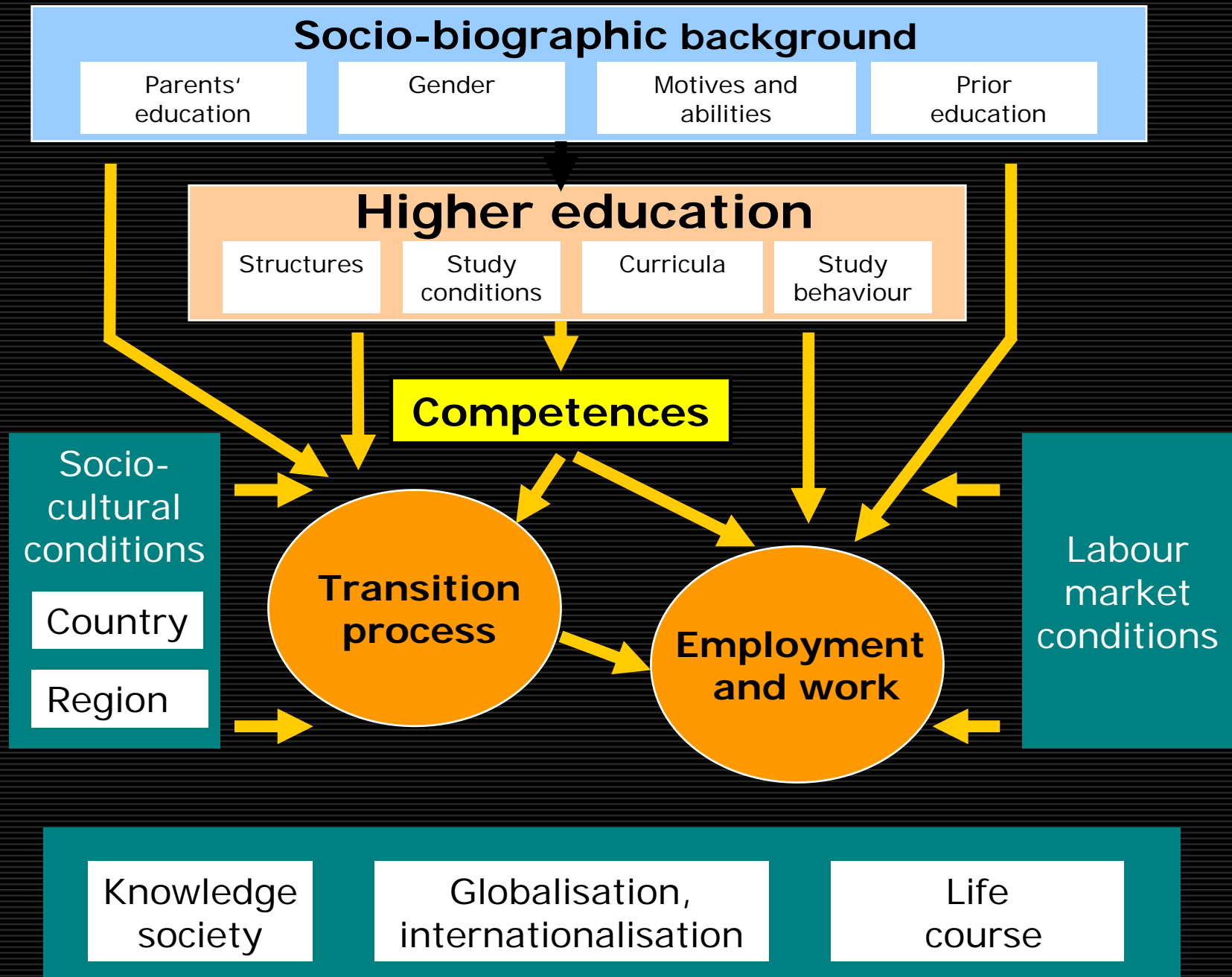
# Key Problem: The Simple Match Approach

- ❑ Labour market outcomes (e.g. income, time to get the first job, quality of the first job) should NOT be taken as performance indicators of HE
- ❑ In Germany no rankings of institutions of higher education according labour market outcomes are published
- ❑ Context factors and the mission of an individual institution of HE should be considered
- ❑ Interpretation is needed

# The Key Model of Analysis in Higher Education Research







# Content of Questionnaire

- ❑ Long questionnaire – 16 pages, 400 variables
- ❑ Subjective and objective indicators of professional success
- ❑ Competences and work requirements
- ❑ Job motivation and job satisfaction
- ❑ Retrospective assessment of study conditions and study provisions

# Part 2

Germany:

Almost all universities  
now want to have their  
own Graduate Surveys

# Graduate Surveys in Germany

- ❑ Regular nation wide surveys (HIS)
- ❑ Nation wide surveys as a part of international surveys (CHEERS and REFLEX – INCHER-Kassel)
- ❑ Regional Surveys (Bavarian Graduate Panel Survey)
- ❑ Many institutional surveys or study programme/field of study related surveys
- ❑ *NEW: Cooperation of about 40 universities in Germany*

# The University Cooperation Project

Regular  
national and  
international  
conferences/  
workshops

Joint project  
Implementation of  
„Graduate Surveys“  
at 40 universities

**Coordinator**  
**INCHER-Kassel**

Web  
facilities

Network  
„Graduate Surveys“

Regular  
meetings  
of a working group  
(activists  
from universities)

# Main Objectives of the University Cooperation Project

- ❑ To assist Universities to implement a regular survey system
- ❑ To help to enhance the relevance of higher education
- ❑ To train people at the university level in all aspects of conducting graduate surveys
- ❑ Efficiency and quality of the surveys
- ❑ To get sufficient data for comparative analysis

# Methodological Approach

- ☐ Core questionnaire
- ☐ Adaptation to the individual institution and/or study programme/faculty
- ☐ Comparison of universities by study programme
- ☐ Feedback for individual universities
- ☐ Training
- ☐ Assistance, service for the universities

# The Members

- Network: 60-80 individual members from universities and higher education research institutions
- Joint Graduate Survey Project: 40 universities
  - Mainly big universities
  - All elite institutions
  - Bavaria not included



# Why are German Universities interested to participate and to conduct graduate surveys regularly?

- ❑ Required by law in some German regions (or contracts)
- ❑ Creation of new study programmes should demonstrate the labour market relevance („employability“)
- ❑ New stakeholder approach (pupils, students, parents, academic staff ...)
- ❑ Evaluation and quality assurance
  - *Graduate surveys as criteria of excellence*

# Vision

- ❑ All universities are providing relevant information about their graduates: *graduate monitor*
- ❑ Every year – online surveys – more than 50% participation rate
- ❑ All levels
- ❑ National database
- ❑ Follow up 5 years after graduation
- ❑ Information used for accreditation and re-accreditation
- ❑ Curriculum development, et al

# Summary and Conclusion (1)

- ❑ The conduction of Graduate Surveys is difficult and costly
- ❑ The quality of many surveys is low
  - Low response rate
  - Limited information (wrong questions)
  - Results are not comparable
  - Wrong or missing interpretation
- ❑ The majority of German Universities decided to overcome these problems with the Joint Graduate Survey Project

# Summary and Conclusion (2)

- ❑ The results should be relevant for an individual institution
- ❑ The expertise of university staff members is needed for
  - Questionnaire development
  - Interpretation of findings
- ❑ A higher response rate is expected when the questionnaire is adapted to the specifics of an institution of higher education
- ❑ Help and assistance from an research institute is necessary: cost reduction and quality

# Further Information

- ❑ <http://www.uni-kassel.de/incher>
- ❑ Publications in Spanish language are available
- ❑ HANDBOOK
- ❑ Schomburg, Harald: Manual para estudios de seguimiento de graduados universitarios. CSUCA-InWEnt-Universidad de Kassel-Universidad Pedagogica Nacional Francisco Morazan. Guatemala: Editorial Serviprensa 2004. Download: <http://www.qtafi.de>

# Graduate Surveys

## No work for Hercule



Quelle: www.kassel.de