

The Hannover Firm Panel (HFP)

By Knut Gerlach, Olaf Hübler, and Wolfgang Meyer

For a better understanding of the labour market it is necessary to look beyond the aggregates (McGuckin 1995). In Germany this is facilitated at the labour supply side since the early eighties by a household panel. Micro panel data describing the demand side became available approximately ten years later. The Hannover Firm Panel was one of the early data sets with firm level information (Brand et al. 1998). Since 1988 a team from the Institute of Quantitative Economic Research at the University of Hannover has planned and conceived an establishment panel in Lower Saxony. The aim was to survey, on a yearly basis, various quantitative and qualitative characteristics relating to employment, innovations, international and environmental activities of a fixed number of manufacturing establishments. Eventually, with the generous financial support of the Volkswagen Foundation a first project phase could be realised. The first wave started in 1994 with 1.025 enterprises and the number of participating firms decreased to 709 in the fourth wave (1997) due to panel mortality. Since funding terminated in 1997 there seemed to be no opportunity to extend the panel to additional years.

However, at the end of the nineties the IAB-Establishment Panel project group suggested an integration of the HFP with the IAB Panel (Bellmann 2002) as a regional subsample. This reduced the survey costs substantially and with new financial support by the Federal State of Lower Saxony a second project phase could be started in the year 2000. The integration of the HFP had two consequences: The sample was enlarged from manufacturing to all sectors of the Lower Saxonian economy and the list of issues analysed was scaled-down to employment and closely related topics. Since 2002 the Ministry of Economics, Labour and Communication of Lower Saxony is our new project partner and this collaboration will be a good basis for future waves of the HFP.

This paper describes the HFP in five steps. Firstly, it gives a sketch of the sampling design. A brief description of the informational content of the data set follows. Subsequently, selected empirical studies, using the HFP, are outlined and the access to the data is described. It ends with a look ahead.