

The Benefits of Cooperation in Online Teaching

**How Universities Can Respond to some of the
Challenges of Today and Tomorrow**

EUNIS-Rectors 2012, Praha

Paul Rühl, Managing Director,

Bavarian Virtual University

Presentation structure

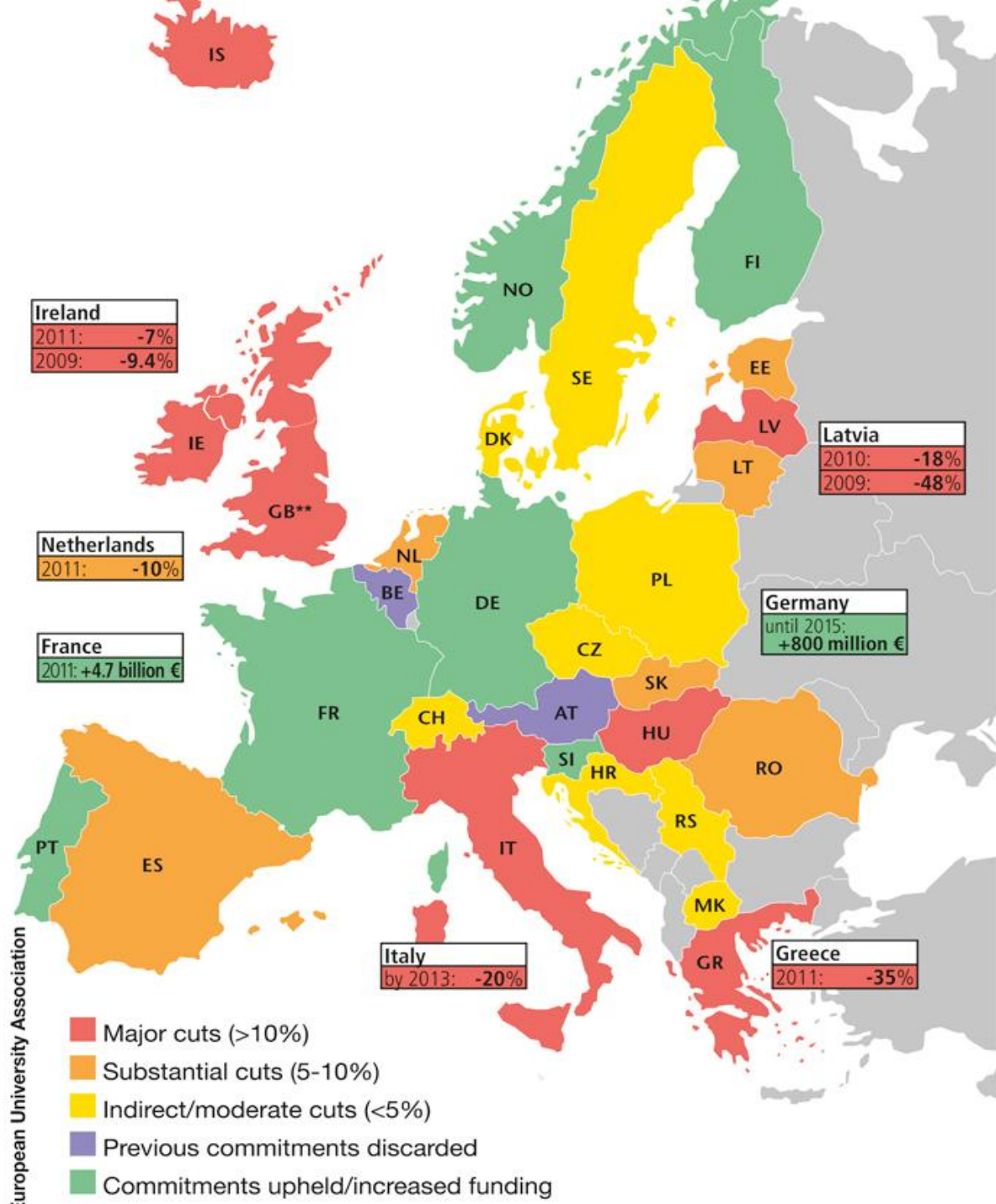
1. The challenges
2. The BVU - key facts and figures
3. The BVU – principles and success factors
4. Who benefits?
5. Lessons learned

1. The challenges

2. The BVU - key facts and figures
3. The BVU – principles and success factors
4. Who benefits?
5. Lessons learned

The challenges - 1

- **The world is facing a major financial crisis**
- **Public budgets are strained**
- **Many countries need to expand their higher education systems: better education for more students**
- **Most European countries have made substantial cuts in their higher education budgets, cf. a survey by the European University Association:**



The challenges - 2

- In many European countries the majority of the students today are „non-traditional“.

These students need more flexible studies.

- Universities are expected to play a more active role in lifelong learning.

This, too, requires more flexibility.

- The role of ICT in education is still growing.

This is especially true for higher education.

The challenges - 3

- **Cooperation in online teaching is one of the valid responses to these challenges.**
- **An example for this kind of cooperation is the Bavarian Virtual University (BVU)**

1. The challenges

2. The BVU - key facts and figures

3. The BVU – principles and success factors

4. Who benefits?

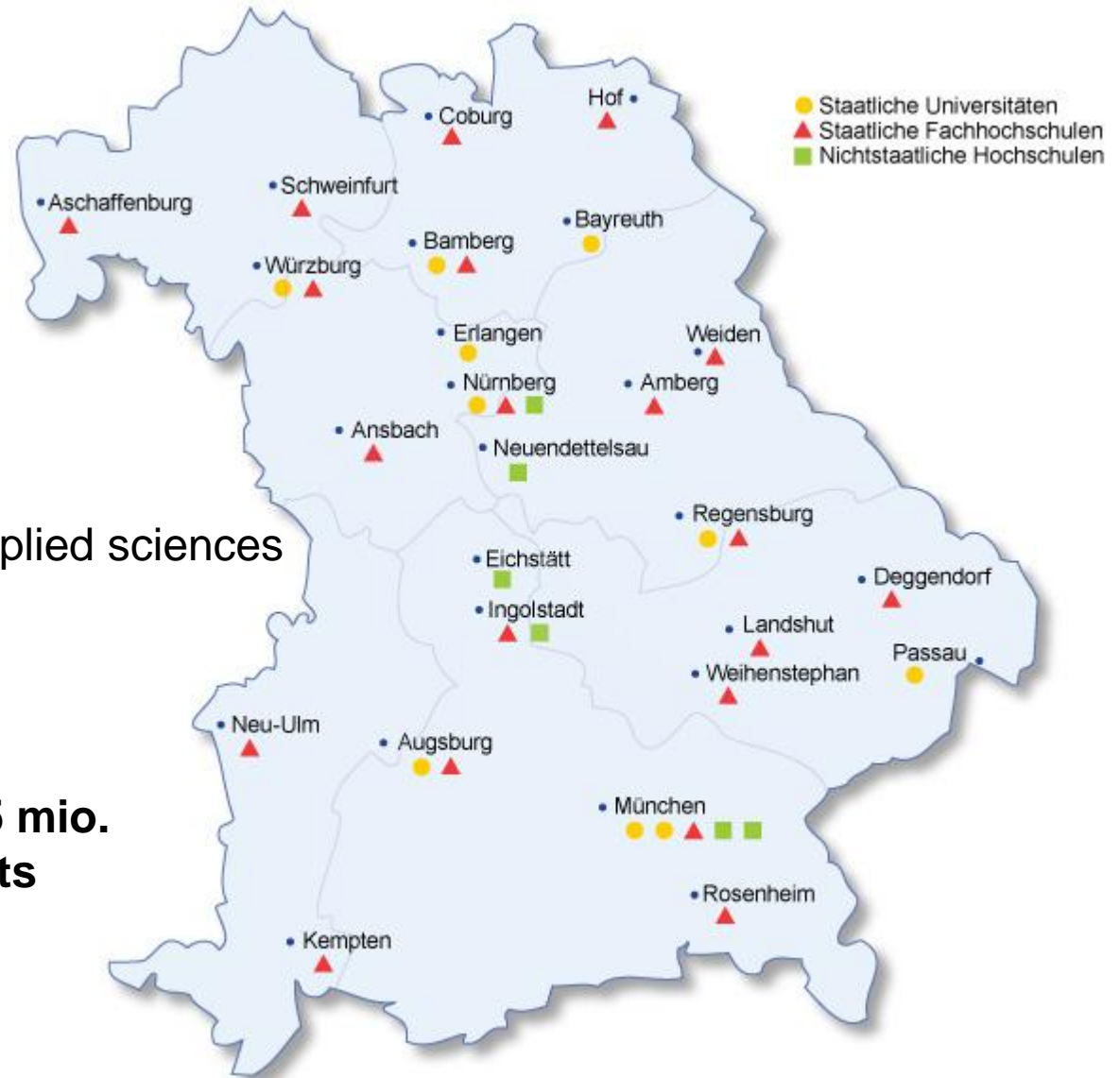
5. Lessons learned

The Bavarian Virtual University (VHB = Virtuelle Hochschule Bayern)

- An institute formed by all the universities and the universities of applied sciences in Bavaria (not an independent university!)
- In operation since May 2000



Member universities



9 state universities
17 state universities of applied sciences
5 further universities

Bavaria:

- population appr. 12.5 mio.
- appr. 320,000 students

The aim of the BVU

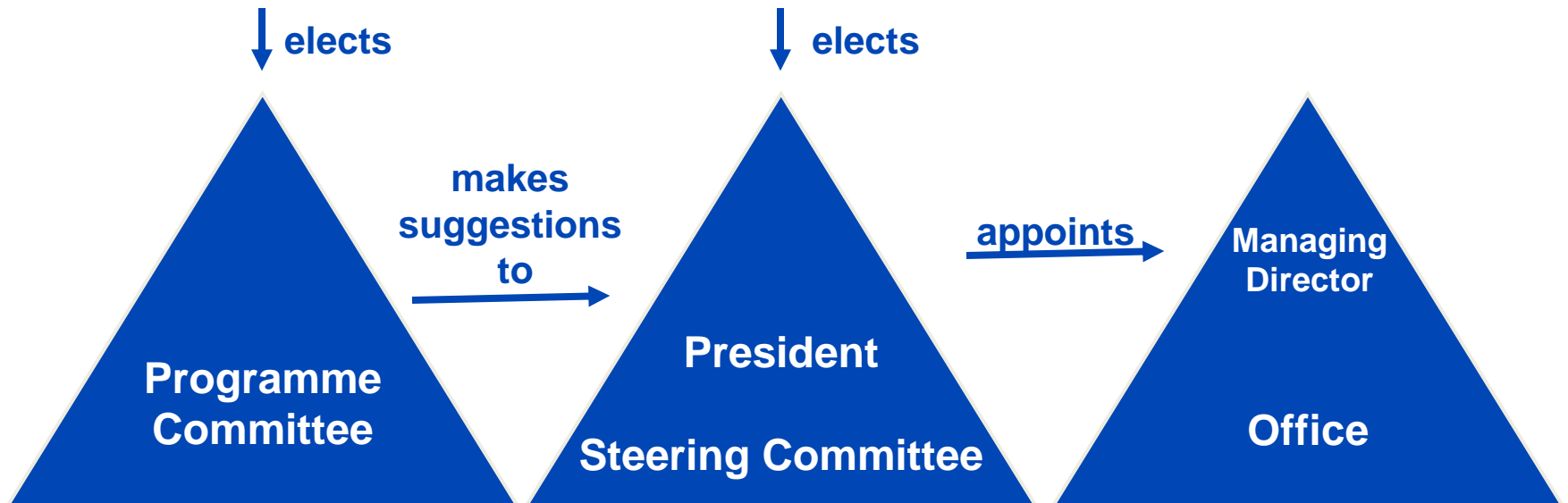
- To complement the programmes of the traditional universities, not to replace them
- No degrees, only credit points
- Supporting member universities
 - in educating growing numbers of students while state funding does not grow proportionally
 - in providing better services, especially to non-traditional students

Structures - 1

31 Member Universities

Delegate Commissioners to

Members' Assembly



Structures - 2

- **Members' Assembly:**

basic decisions; elects Steering Committee and Programme Committee

- **President and Steering Committee:**

budget decisions; supervision of Managing Director and Office

- **Programme Committee:**

suggestions to Steering Committee for programme structure and quality management

- **Managing Director / Office:**

day-to-day business: project management, budget implementation, user registration and service, public relations (16 members of staff)

Structures - 3

- Central server for information and registration only
- Courses on servers of member universities;
main data traffic between students and
member universities
- Various learning and content management systems
in use; Moodle most popular

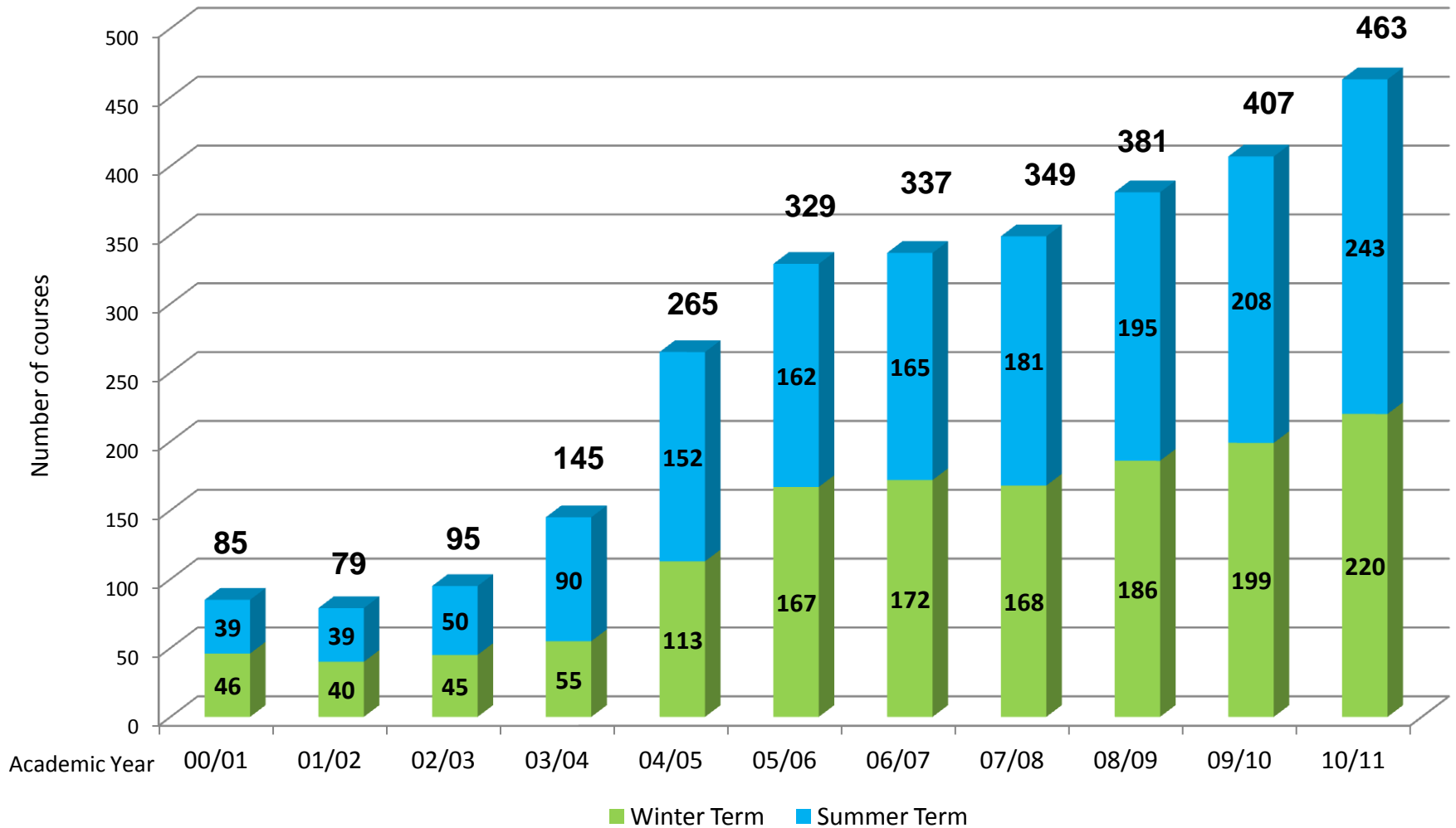
Courses - 1

- Types of courses:
 - lecture + tutorial
 - virtual seminar with student collaboration and tutorial guidance
 - exceptionally: self-instruction environment with optional tutoring

Courses - 2

- Summer term 2012: 268 different courses.
- A vhb-course typically equals 3 – 4 ECTS credit points.
- All courses must be as **interactive** as possible.
- All courses **completely online**; final exam often face-to-face.
- Currently 60 new courses are being developed.
- Annual calls for additional proposals

Courses in operation



Programme structure

(Summer term 2012; amount of courses in brackets)

- Business Sciences (44)
- Computer Science (13)
- Cultural Studies (6)
- Engineering (23)
- Health Care / Health Management (7)
- Key Skills (20)
- Languages (31)
- Law (34)
- Medical Science (47)
- Natural Sciences (2)
- Social Sciences (1)
- Social Work (15)
- Teacher Training (25)

Figures for the academic year 2010 / 2011

- **463 courses in operation**
- **Approximately 80,000 course enrolments**
by over
- **32,000 individual students**

(Total enrolment over 210,000 semester credit hours)

- **59,5 % participation in the final course examinations**

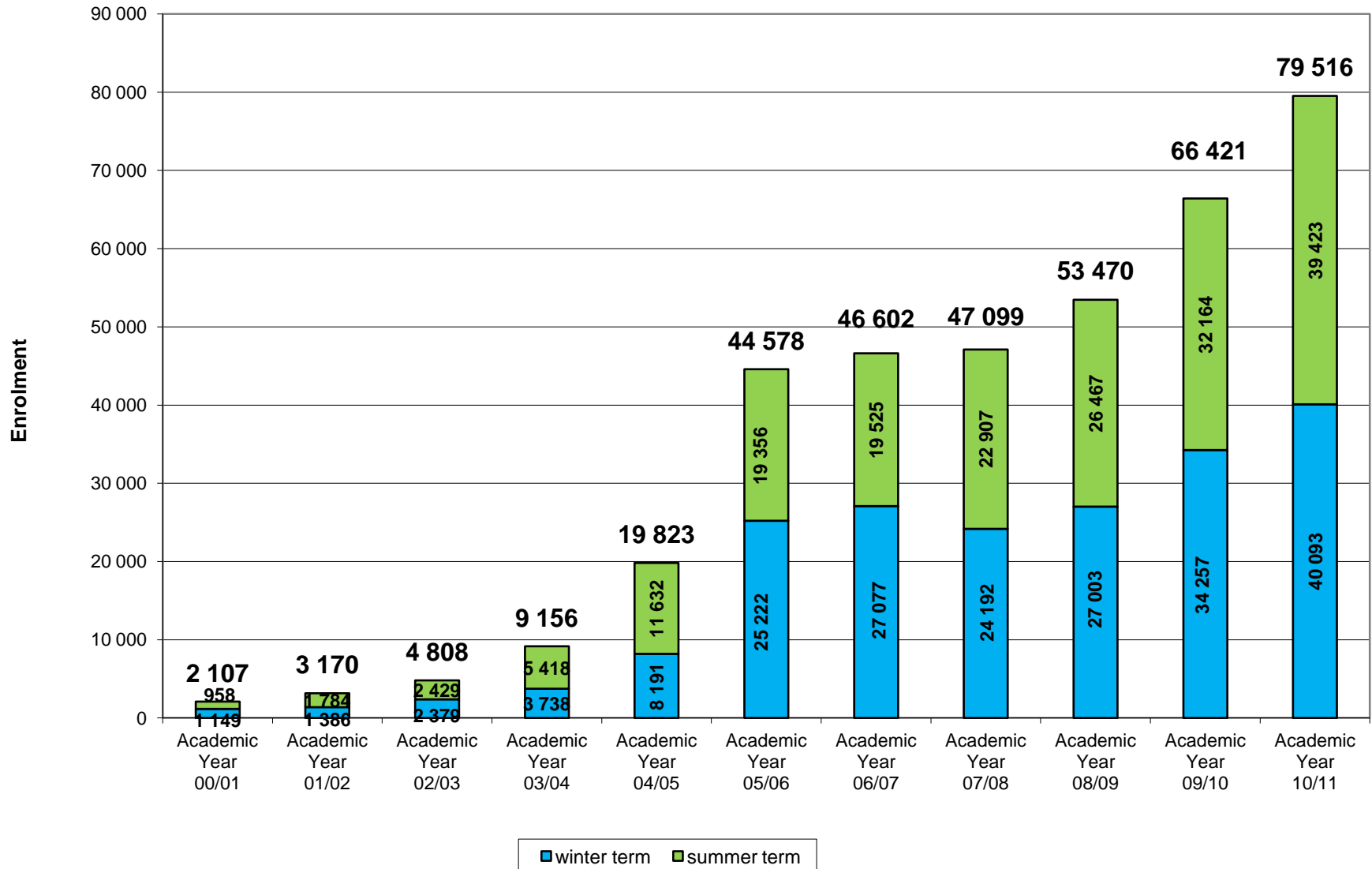
Expectations for 2011 / 2012

- **510 courses in operation**
- **More than 100,000 course enrolments**
by nearly
- **40,000 individual students**

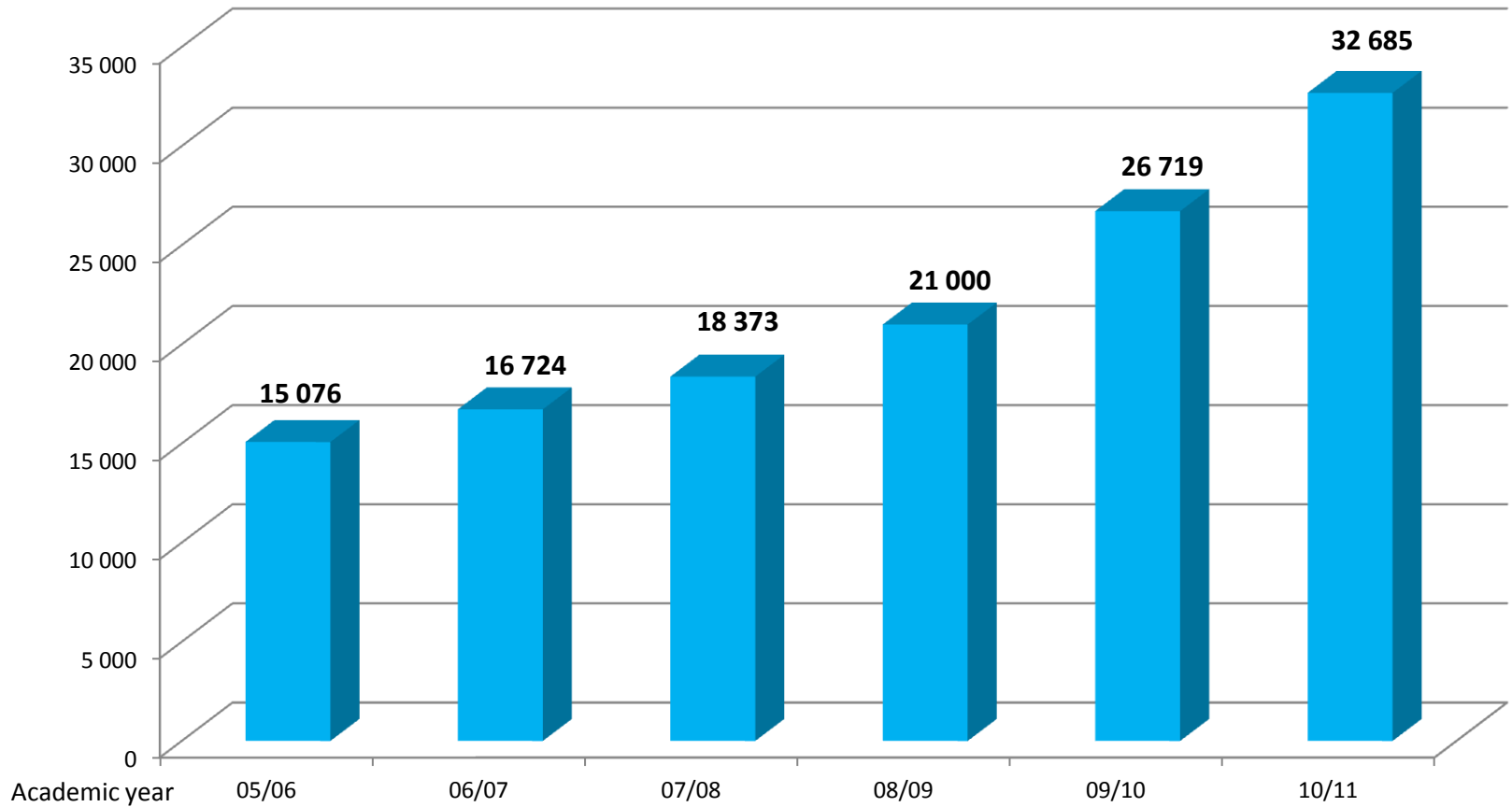
(Total enrolment appr. 280,000 semester credit hours)

- **Appr. 60% participation in the final course examinations**

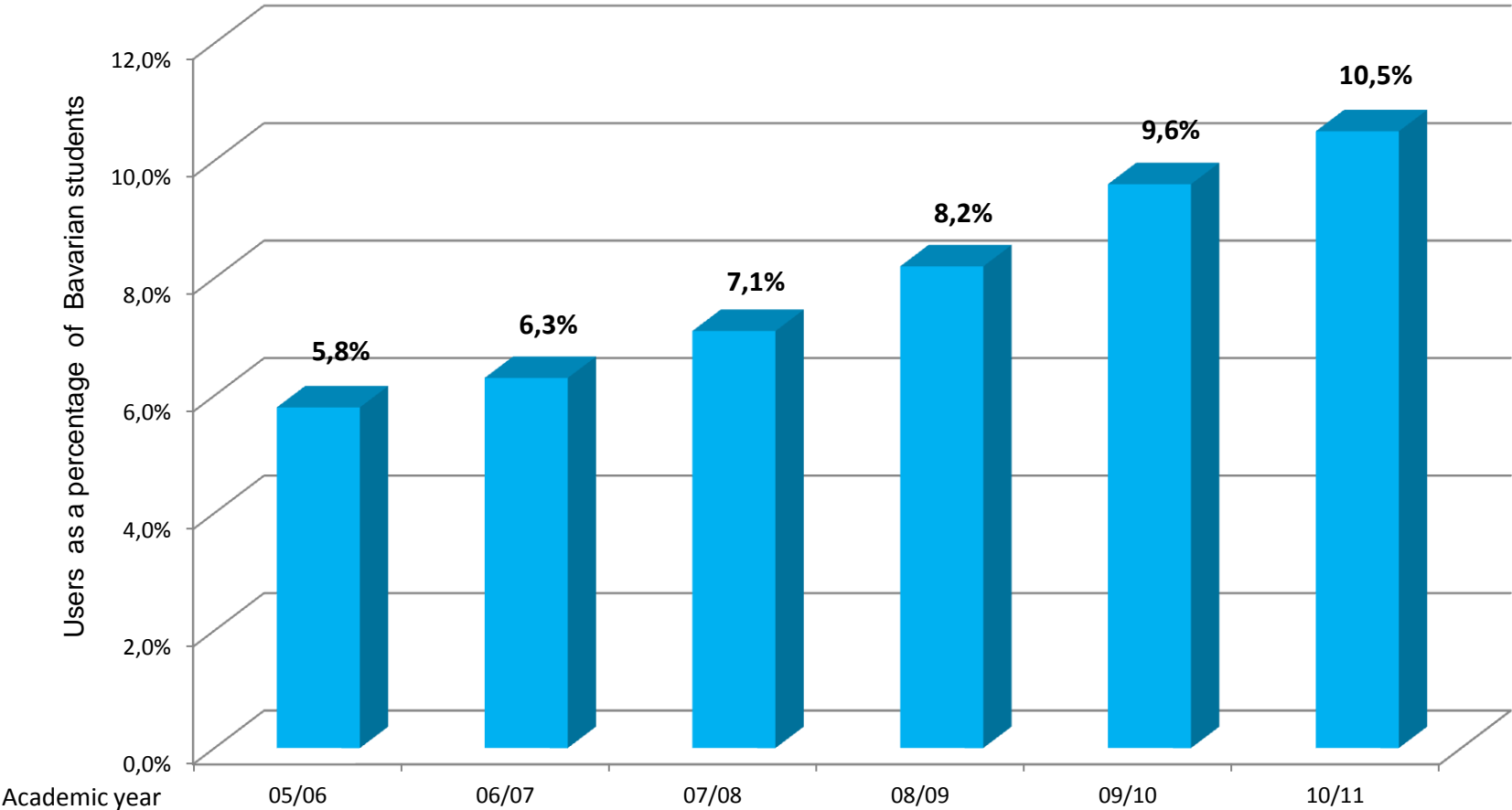
Student enrolment



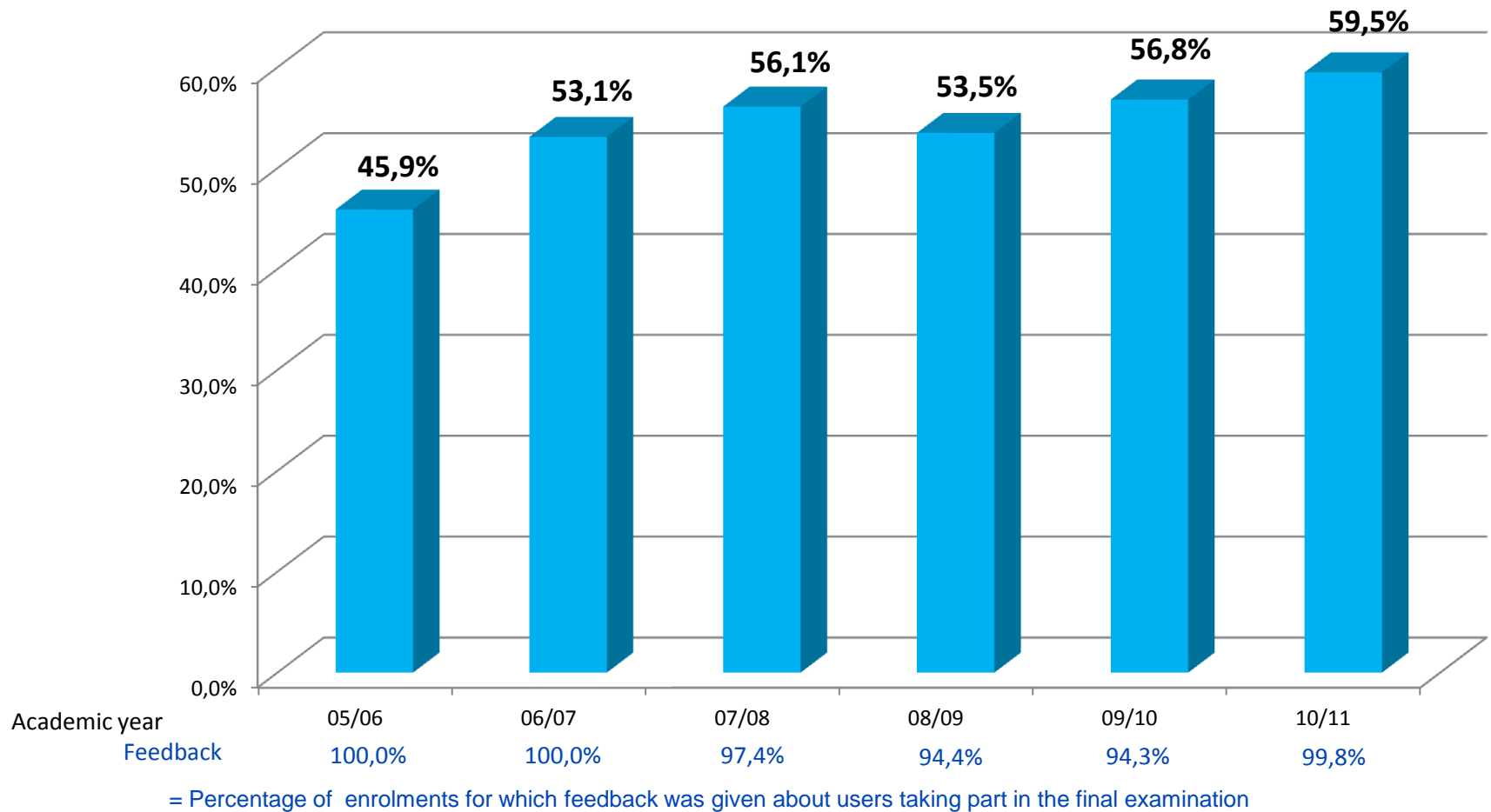
Students taking part in BVU courses



BVU users as a percentage of Bavarian students



BVU course users taking part in a final examination



Budget

- Total expenditure on BVU 2000 – 2011: **€ 35.5 m.** from state budget and other state programmes
- In 2012, an additional **€ 5.8 m.** will be allocated for the purposes of the BVU
- Included: appr. **€ 0.6 m.** annual contributions by member universities

1. The challenges
2. The BVU - key facts and figures
- 3. The BVU – principles and success factors**
4. Who benefits?
5. Lessons learned

Blended Learning: micro / macro level 1

- Blended learning at **micro** level:

Face-to-face and online elements combined within a single course

- Pedagogical benefits
 - „Import“ of courses less attractive (face-to-face elements have to be provided by importing university)
 - Costs probably higher than for traditional courses or online-courses
- ▶ Hardly suitable for cooperation between universities

Blended Learning: micro / macro level 2

- Blended learning at **macro** level:

Online courses are part of a course of study / curriculum which mainly consists of traditional face-to-face courses

- „Import“ of courses easy and attractive
- Pedagogical and economic advantages combined
- ▶ Suitable for cooperation between universities

The experience of the BVU shows:

Macro level blended learning is

- attractive,**
- effective,**
- economically feasible.**

Macro level blended learning is an excellent instrument for universities cooperating in teaching.

1. The challenges
2. The BVU - key facts and figures
3. The BVU – principles and success factors
- 4. Who benefits?**
5. Lessons learned

Who benefits?

The BVU has to serve the needs and (not always identical!) interests of three target groups:

- students
- teachers
- universities

Who benefits?

Students

- Flexibility (therefore priority given to asynchronous forms of communication)
- Larger choice of courses (and teachers)
- No extra fees
- Strict quality management (student + peer evaluation)
- Added value: developing „e-literacy“ within the traditional curriculum
→ enhancing employability without additional effort

Who benefits?

Teachers

- Financial support for course development **and course maintenance** (online tutors and necessary improvements)
- Larger variety of pedagogical possibilities
- Wider range of teaching
- Community building

Who benefits?

Universities

- „Import“ of courses widens range of subjects
- Shortages in teaching capacities can be relieved
- Establishing common quality standards;
strict quality management (peer evaluation of teaching)
- Transparency in all decisions, especially funding;
all decisions made by elected representatives of member
universities

Who benefits?

Society and the state

- Cost-effectiveness;
no “re-invention of the wheel” at public expense
 - Lean organisation, simple structures
 - Drawing upon the expertise and competence of the member universities, using their infrastructure as much as possible
- Support by government, esp. by Ministry of Higher Education

1. The challenges
2. The BVU - key facts and figures
3. The BVU – principles and success factors
4. Who benefits?
- 5. Lessons learned**

Lessons learned - 1

- Technology enhanced teaching and learning are especially attractive and productive if universities **cooperate** and students enjoy maximum **flexibility**.
- Therefore: focus on blended learning at **macro** level with **asynchronous** communication.
- Learning is interaction. Putting self-instruction materials on the net is not enough.
- **Tutorial guidance** for students from “importing” universities must be financed. Supporting course production alone is not sufficient.

Lessons learned - 2

- Funding decisions should be based on actual **demand** rather than on research interest or development interest
- Reliable **user statistics** are indispensable as evidence in discussions with decision makers.
To claim “better quality” is not enough.

Lessons learned - 3

- **Simple** structures, **lean** organisation
- **Transparency** of all procedures, especially of decision making
- **Flexibility** in regard to
 - the development of the course programme
 - the development of personnel
 - the use of teaching and learning software
- Close **cooperation** of all partners

Lessons learned - 4

- When in doubt: **quality** before quantity; strict quality management.

Dedicated teachers appreciate peer evaluation of teaching.

- Do not produce more courses than you will be able to maintain (tutoring included!).

Please visit

www.vhb.org

In English:

<http://www.vhb.org/en/homepage/>

Thank you for your attention

Contact:

paul.ruehl@vhb.org