



ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC  
CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT



# **AHELO - the OECD Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes - and student achievement: progress to date**

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**CHEA International Seminar**  
*Washington 27 January 2010*

THE OECD

ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES (AHELO)



The graphic features a blue background with a repeating pattern of the text 'AHELO'. It includes several key elements: the words 'learning outcomes' and 'assessment' in white text; the words 'higher education' and 'diversity' in white text; the word 'improvement' in white text; the OECD logo in white; and three photographs: a laboratory scene with two scientists, a group of diverse students in a classroom, and a student raising their hand in a lecture hall.



The new online collaborative platform set up to help governments and other stakeholders respond to the global economic crisis



Officially launched by OECD Secretary General at the Meeting of the Council at Ministerial Level:  
"The Crisis and Beyond: building a stronger, cleaner, fairer world economy"

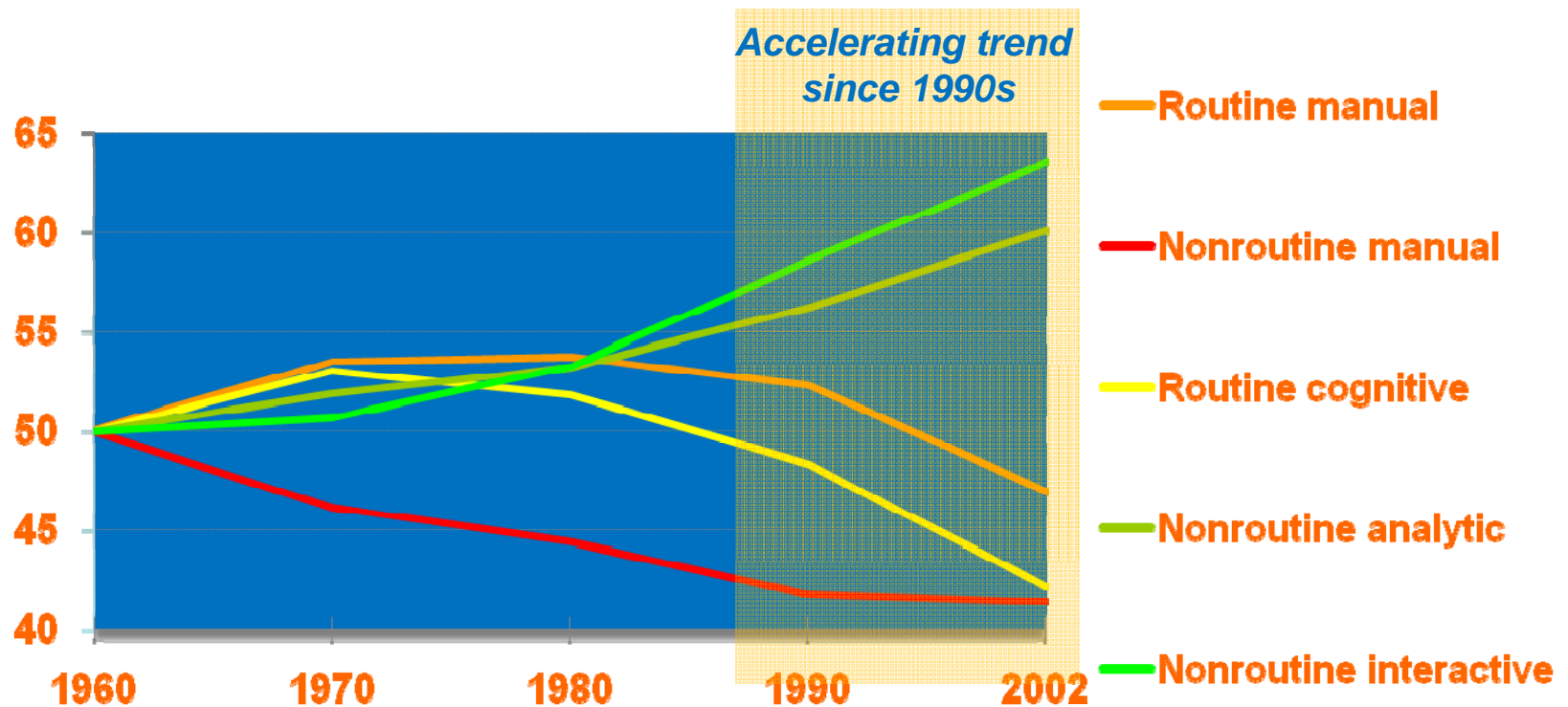
Paris , 24-25 June 2009.

- Up-to-the-minute information, evidence and analysis on the impact of the crisis on education, with concrete examples of how governments and institutions in different countries are coping with the crisis.
- An opportunity for information sharing with other members of the fast-growing OECD social network.

[www.oecd.org/edu/lighthouse](http://www.oecd.org/edu/lighthouse)

# Change in the demand for skills in the knowledge economy

*Economy-wide measures of routine and non-routine task input (US)*



Levy and Murnane

# What new skills are in demand?

## Collaborators and orchestrators

The more complex the globalised world becomes, the more individuals and companies need various forms of coordination and management

## Synthesisers

Advent of multidisciplinary. We no longer solve problems by breaking them down in manageable bits, but rather by synthesising disparate bits together

## Versatilists

Specialists: deep skills and expertise, but narrow scope beyond their domain

Generalists: shallow skills but broader scope

Versatilists: apply depth of skills to a progressively widening scope of situations and experiences, gaining new competences, assuming new roles

Ability to constantly adapt, learn and grow...

# What new skills are in demand?

## Explainers

Age of over-information (Internet). Filters and explainers become more important as the content we can search and access becomes larger

## Personalisers

Revival of interpersonal skills which had atrophied due to industrial age and the Internet

## Localisers

Localising the global

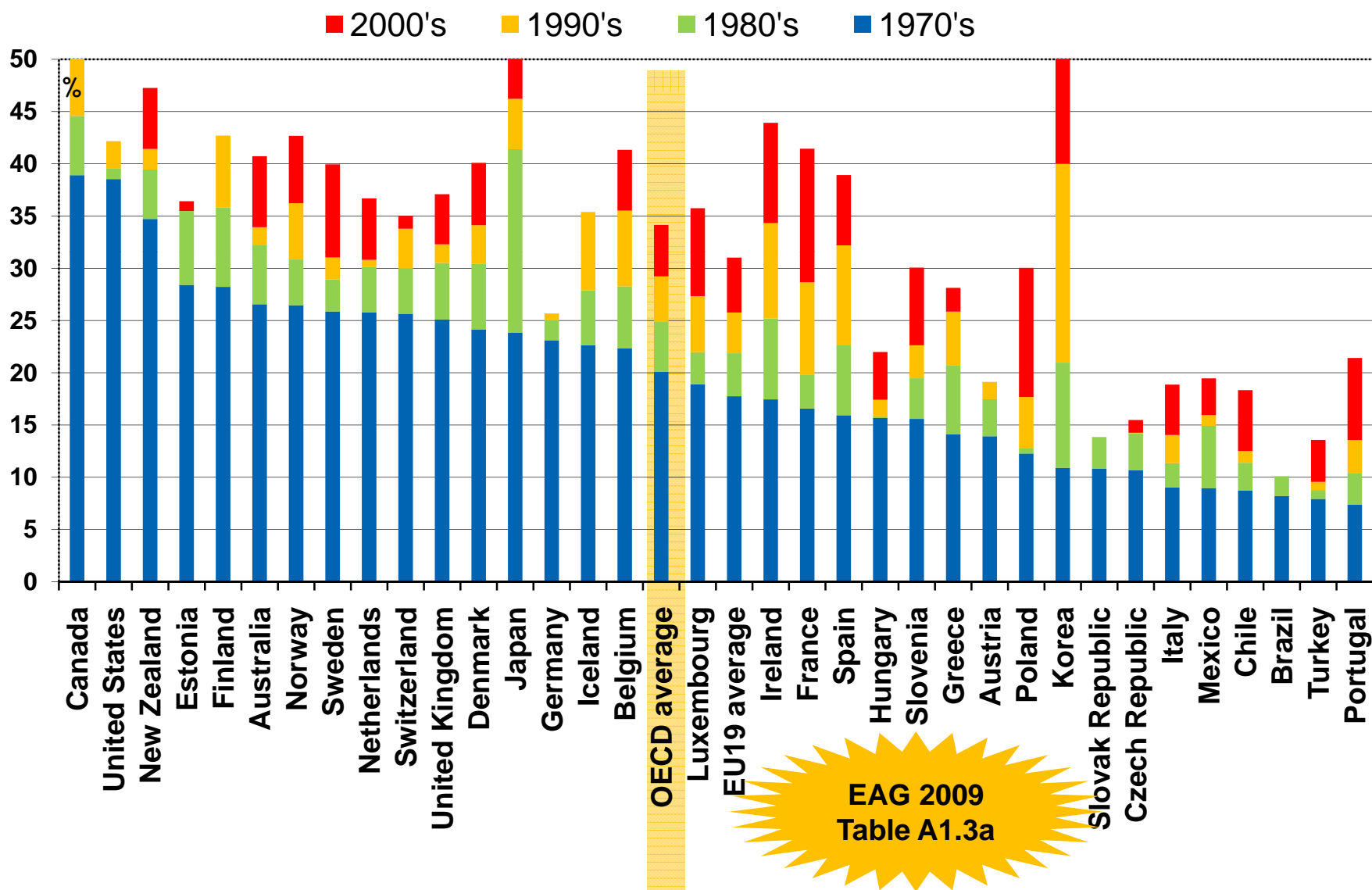


**Over time, higher education is to become the reference level for success in the knowledge economy and society**

# Trends in the supply of global talent pool: OECD evidence

# Growth in university-level qualifications

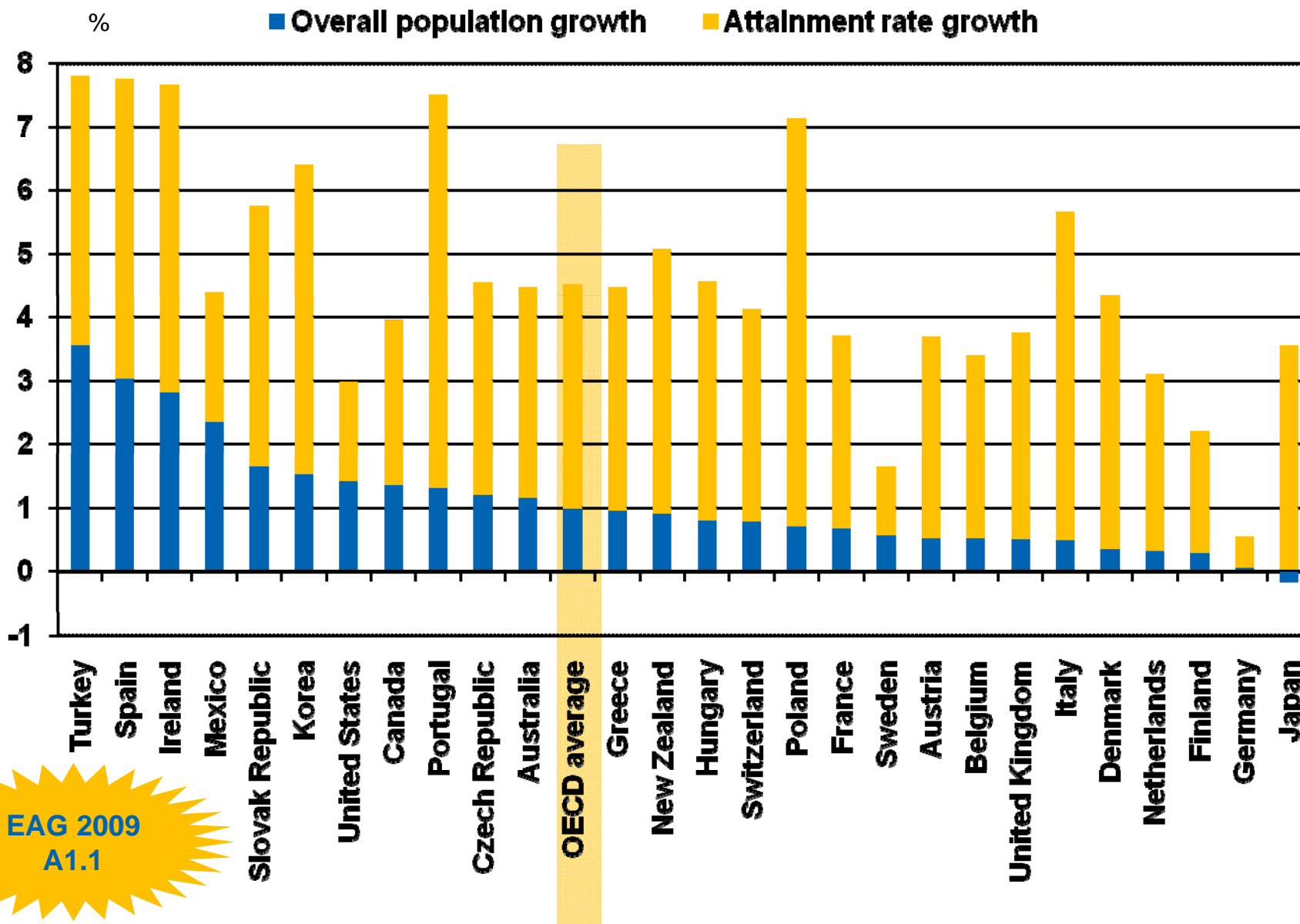
Approximated by the percentage of the population that has attained tertiary-type A education in the age groups 25-34 years, 35-44 years, 45-54 years and 55-64 years (2007)



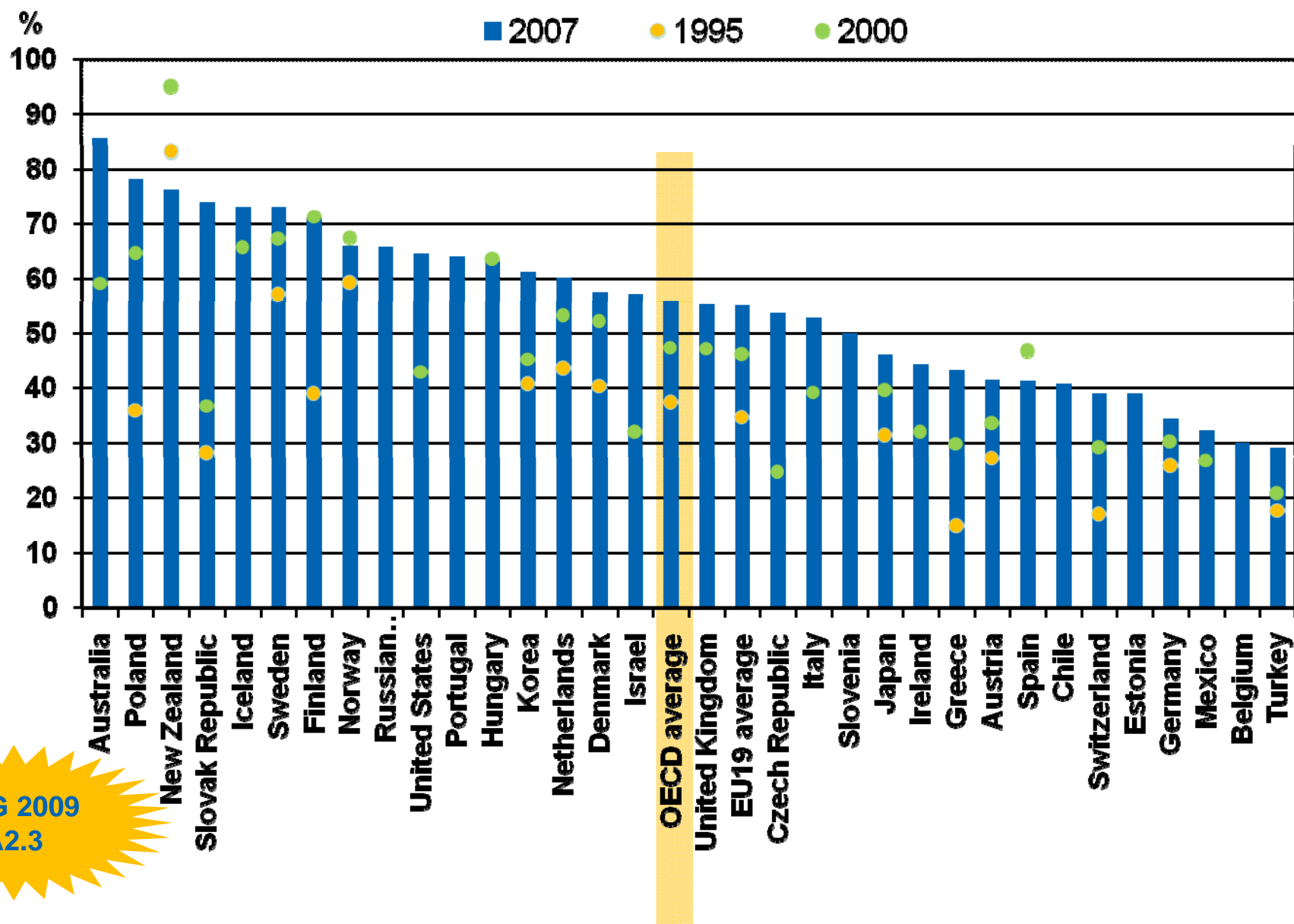
**EAG 2009  
Table A1.3a**



# Average annual growth in the population with tertiary education (1998-2006)



# Entry rates into tertiary-type A education

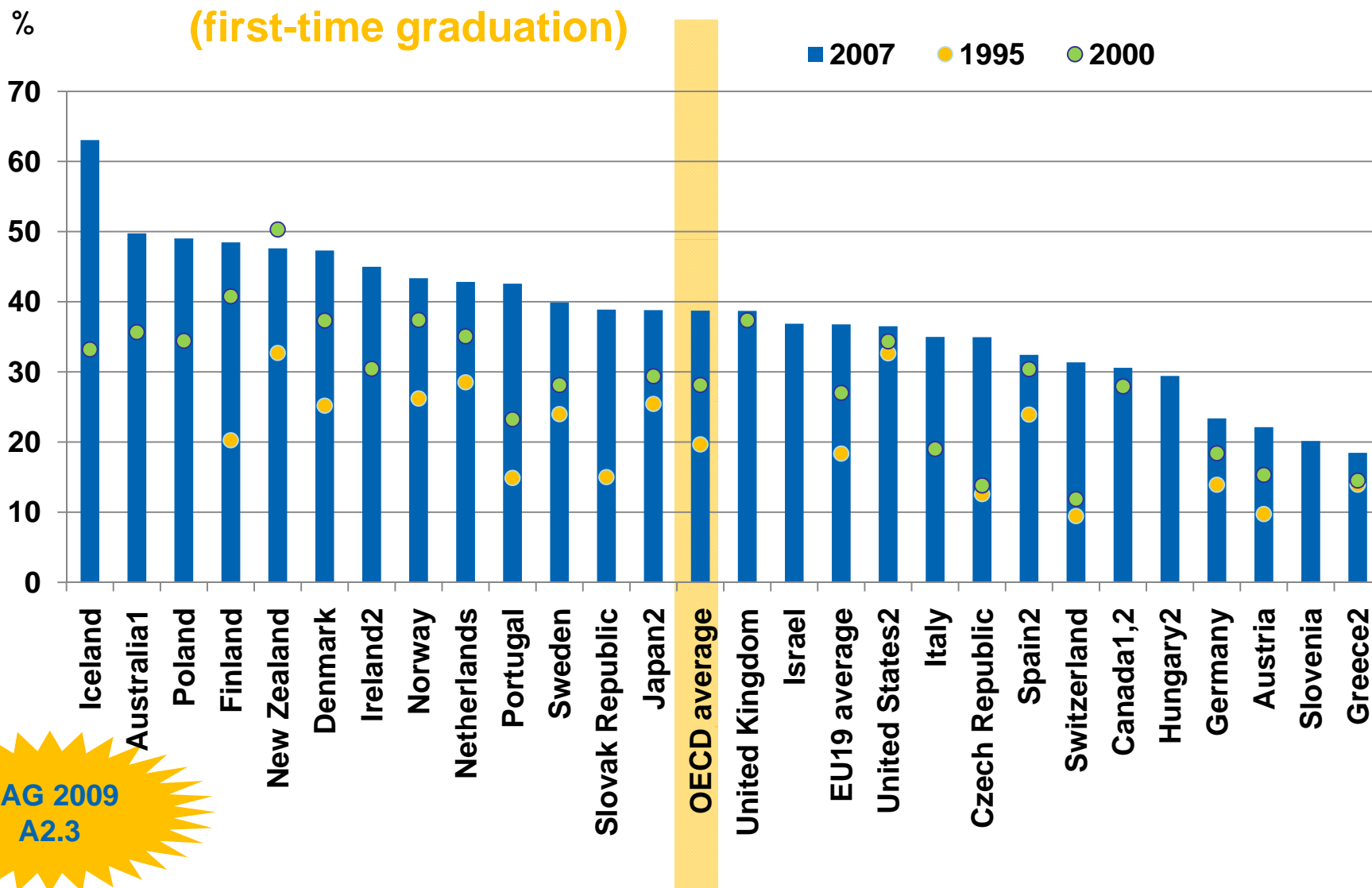


**So do higher education systems  
deliver?**

**Access vs. success:  
Available quantitative evidence**

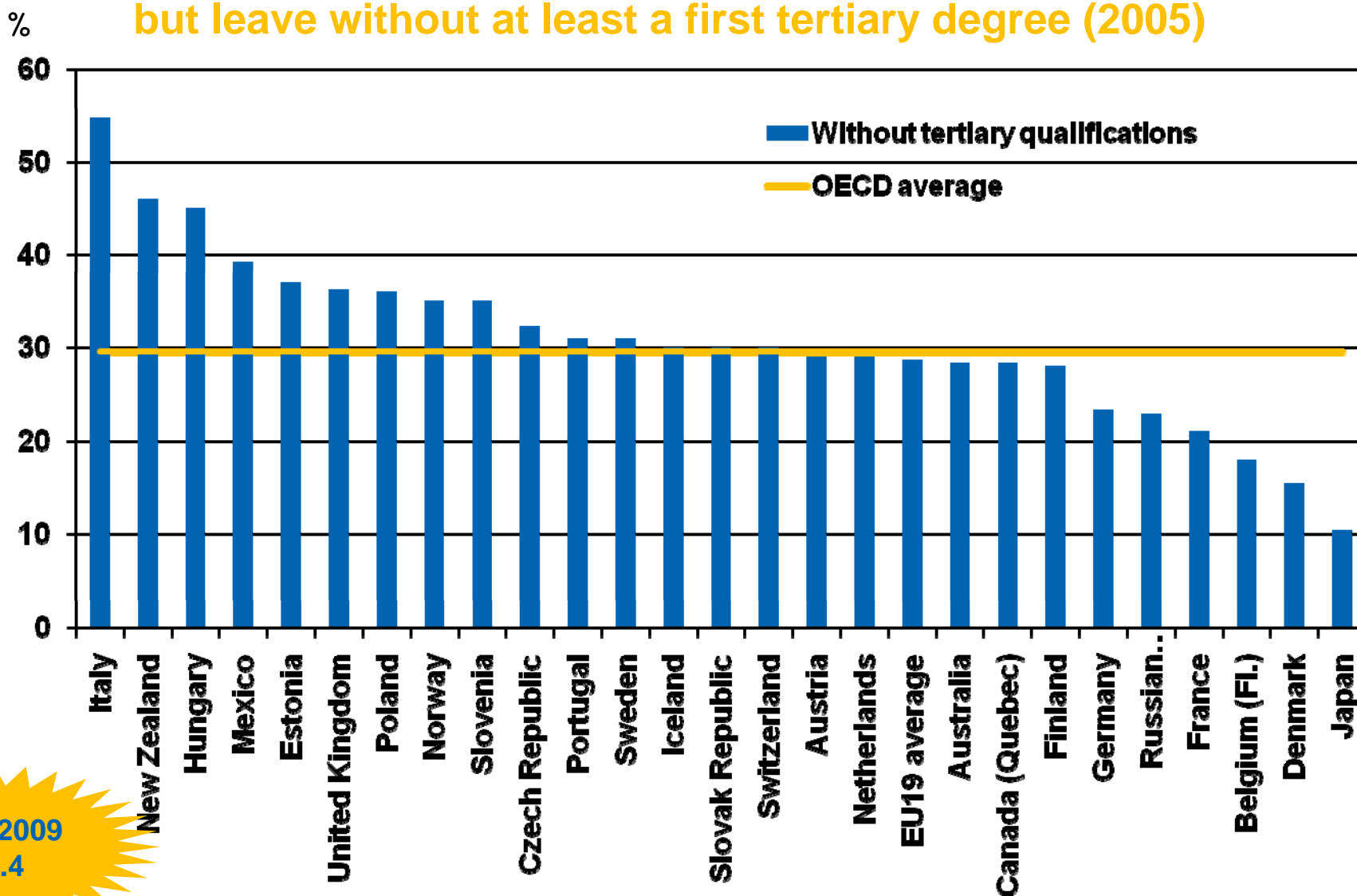
# University graduation doubled in the OECD from 20% in 1995 to 39% in 2007

Tertiary-type A graduation rates in 1995, 2000 and 2007  
(first-time graduation)



# But failure remains a problem...

Proportion of students who enter a tertiary programme but leave without at least a first tertiary degree (2005)



**So what is the evidence in qualitative terms?**

# What we know...



**The massification of participation in higher education has meant much more heterogeneous abilities and expectations of students than in the past**



**In most countries, financing has kept pace with the increase in participation, limiting the impact on spending per student**



**Proxies of higher education quality exist, but none are perfect**

- **Rankings often biased towards input factors and research**
- **Subjectivity of reputation factor**
- **Cultural sensitivity of satisfaction factor**
- **Labour market outcomes sensitive to economic circumstances and local conditions**

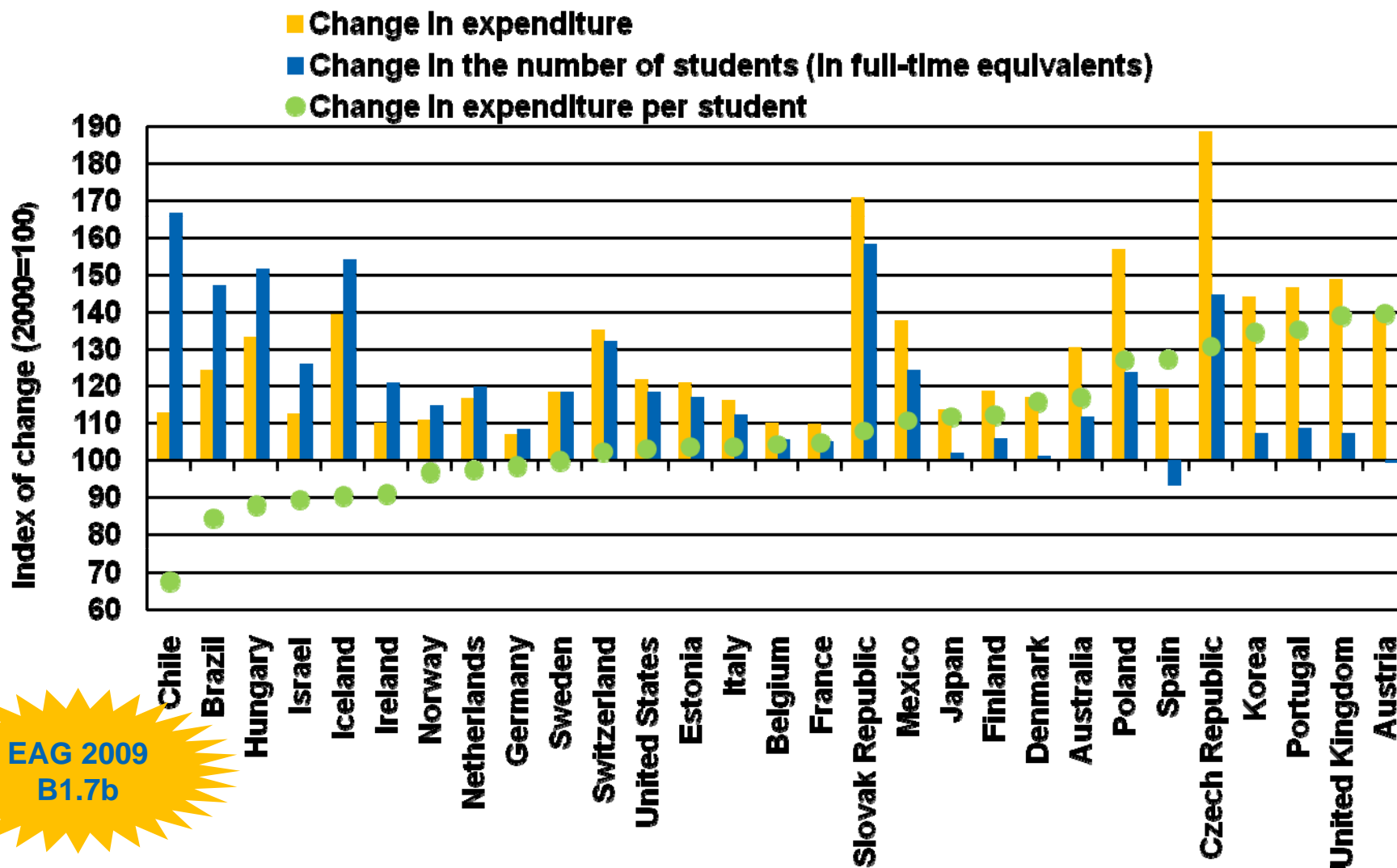


**Learning outcomes as a promising direction**

- **Defining them (Tuning process in Bologna area)**
- **Incorporating them in quality assurance processes**
- **Measuring them (AHELO)**

# Changes in student numbers and expenditure for tertiary education

Index of change between 2000 and 2006 (2000=100, 2006 constant prices)



EAG 2009  
B1.7b



# The AHELO initiative

## What is AHELO?

A ground-breaking initiative to assess HE learning outcomes on an international scale, by creating measures that would be valid:

- For all cultures and languages;
- And also for the diversity of HE institutions.

## Why undertake the study?

After decades of quantitative growth in HE, consensus on the need to ensure quality for all (Athens, 2006)... but information gap on learning outcomes

➡ Carry out a feasibility study to provide a proof of concept (Tokyo, 2008)

## Why is AHELO important?

- Employs a wide range of measures
- Provides faculties, students and government agencies with a more balanced assessment of HE quality – not just research-driven rankings!
- No sacrifice of HEIs' missions or autonomy in their subsequent efforts to improve performance.

# A multi-dimensional definition of quality

## Addressing the needs of various users and uses

- “Bottom line” of performance
- “Value-added” to assess the quality of services
- Contextual data to reveal best practices and problems, and to identify teaching and learning practices leading to better outcomes

## Both in discipline-related competencies ...

- Easily interpretable in the context of departments and faculties ...
- But require highly differentiated instruments

## And in generic skills

- Less dependent on occupational and cultural contexts, applicable across HEIs ...
- But reflect cumulative learning outcomes and less relevant to the subject-matter competencies that are familiar to HEIs, departments or faculties

# A study with great potential...

## ... Diagnosis is the basis of any improvement

Better information on student learning outcomes is the first step to **improve teaching** and learning for all:

- ➔ Provide evidence for national and institutional policy and practice
- ➔ Equip institutions with the method and tools to improve teaching

## ... Shaping the future of higher education to address key challenges

**Equity:**

- ➔ Build fairer higher education systems, promoting success for all

**Responsiveness:**

- ➔ Better connect higher education and society

**Effectiveness:**

- ➔ Help students make informed choices to ensure success for all

**Impact:**

- ➔ Foster international transparency and mobility

# AHELO at a glance

## Goal?

To assess whether reliable cross-national comparisons of HE learning outcomes are **scientifically possible** and whether their **implementation is feasible**.

## What?

Not a pilot, but rather a research approach to provide a proof of concept and proof of practicality.

## Why?

The outcomes will be used to assist countries to decide on the next steps. No pre-determined conclusion.

## When?

Testing window: late 2010-early 2011.

## Who?

Target population of students who are near, but before, the end of their first 3-4 year degree.

## How?

OECD guiding international expert committees  
Contractors in charge of developing the assessment instruments.

# AHELO tests of instruments

## 3 assessment instruments

<b>Assessment generic skills</b>  Including Finland, Korea, Mexico, Norway, United States	<b>Assessment discipline-specific skills in engineering</b>  Including Australia, Japan, Sweden	<b>Assessment discipline-specific skills in economics</b>  Including Belgium (Fl.), Italy, Mexico, Netherlands
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## Contextual instruments

Contextual indicators and indirect proxies of quality  
To analyse determinants of LO and their development



**3 groups of countries**

# AHELO: 4 strands of work

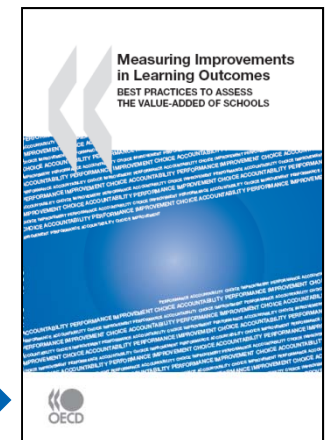
Discipline strand  
in Economics

Discipline strand  
in Engineering

Generic skills strand

Research-based “Value-added” or “Learning gain” measurement strand

Several perspectives to explore the issue of value-added (conceptually, psychometrics), building on recent OECD work at school level.



# Current status



- ✓ **Institutional framework in place**
- ✓ **Substantive work**
  - ✓ Contextual dimension analytical framework
  - ✓ Tuning-AHELO reports
- ✓ **Communication & dissemination**
  - ✓ Stakeholders' Consultative Group
- ✓ **Participating countries**
  - ✓ 14 confirmed participants allocated to various strands of work to ensure geographical, language & cultural diversity
- ✓ **First contract awarded**
- ✓ **Fundraising continues**
- ✓ **Main contractor selected**



# AHELO is managed by the OECD IMHE Programme

## Institutional Management in Higher Education



A network of 246 members from 48 countries



HEIs, government and agencies



Policy analyses and services to members



An institutional voice within OECD



# What are the concrete benefits of becoming a member of IMHE?

Visibility  
Publications  
Information  
Activities Influence  
Conferences Network

*Higher education in a world changed utterly?  
Doing more with less*

*Paris, France 13-15 September 2010*

**Thank you**

**Time for questions and  
comments**

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**For more information, visit**

**[www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo](http://www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo)**