

# Building capacity for change in Ireland

Sarajevo Conference on Higher Education

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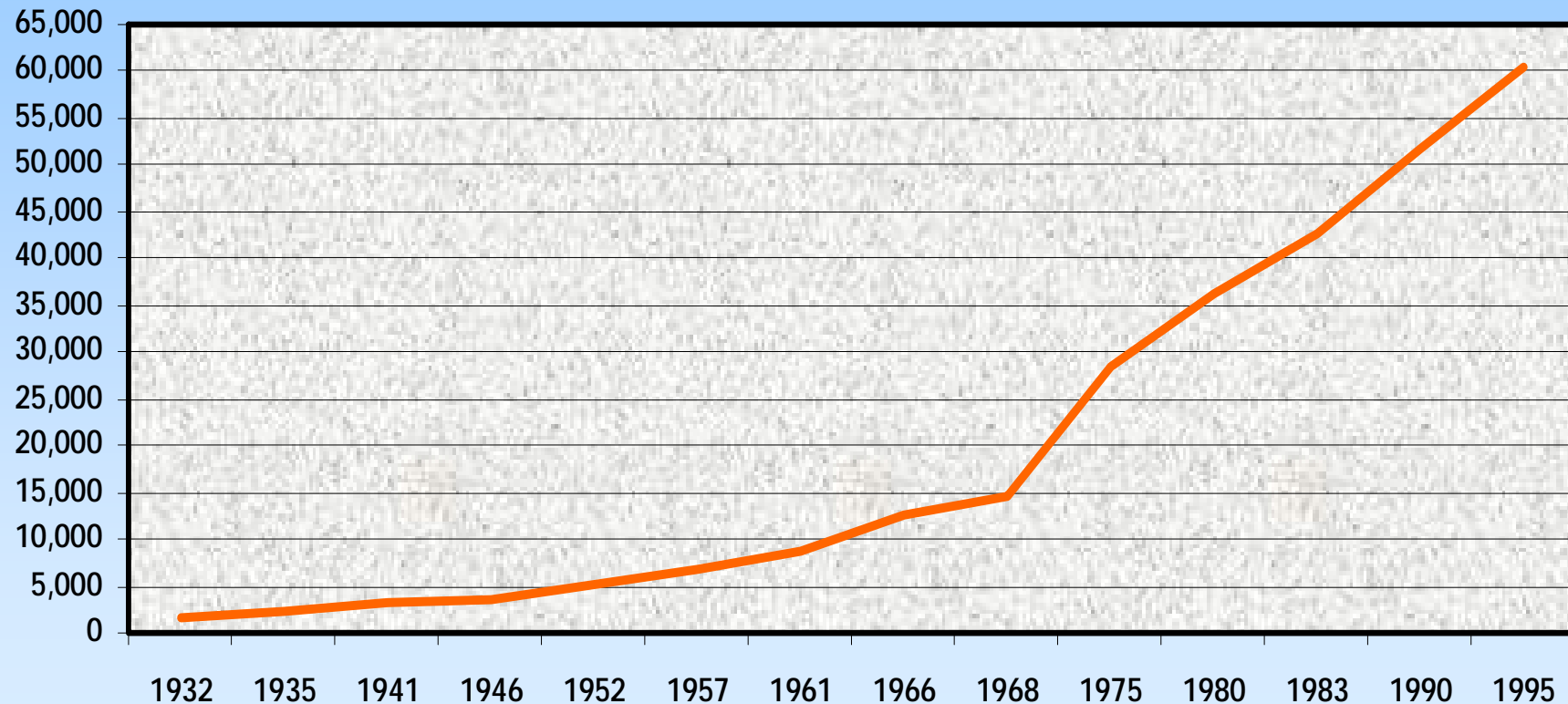
Higher Education Authority

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# The story of Irish education

# Remarkable improvement over time

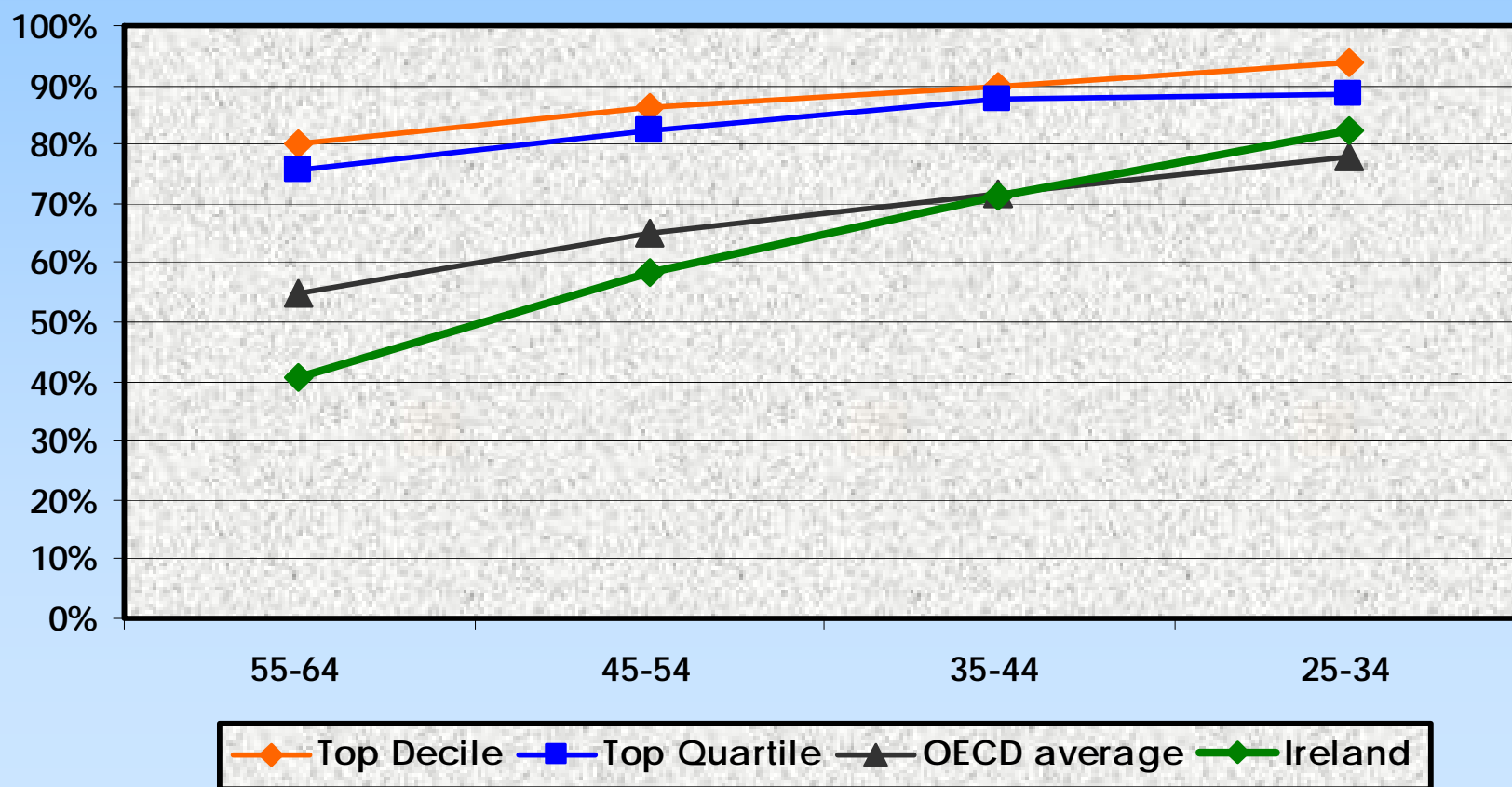
Indicator of Upper Second-Level Attainment: Total number of Leaving Certificate Examination Candidates in English, 1932 to 1995



Data source: Department of Education and Science (2007) Sé Sí, Indicator: 2.11b (p.34 and p.196)

# But we are late starters playing catch-up

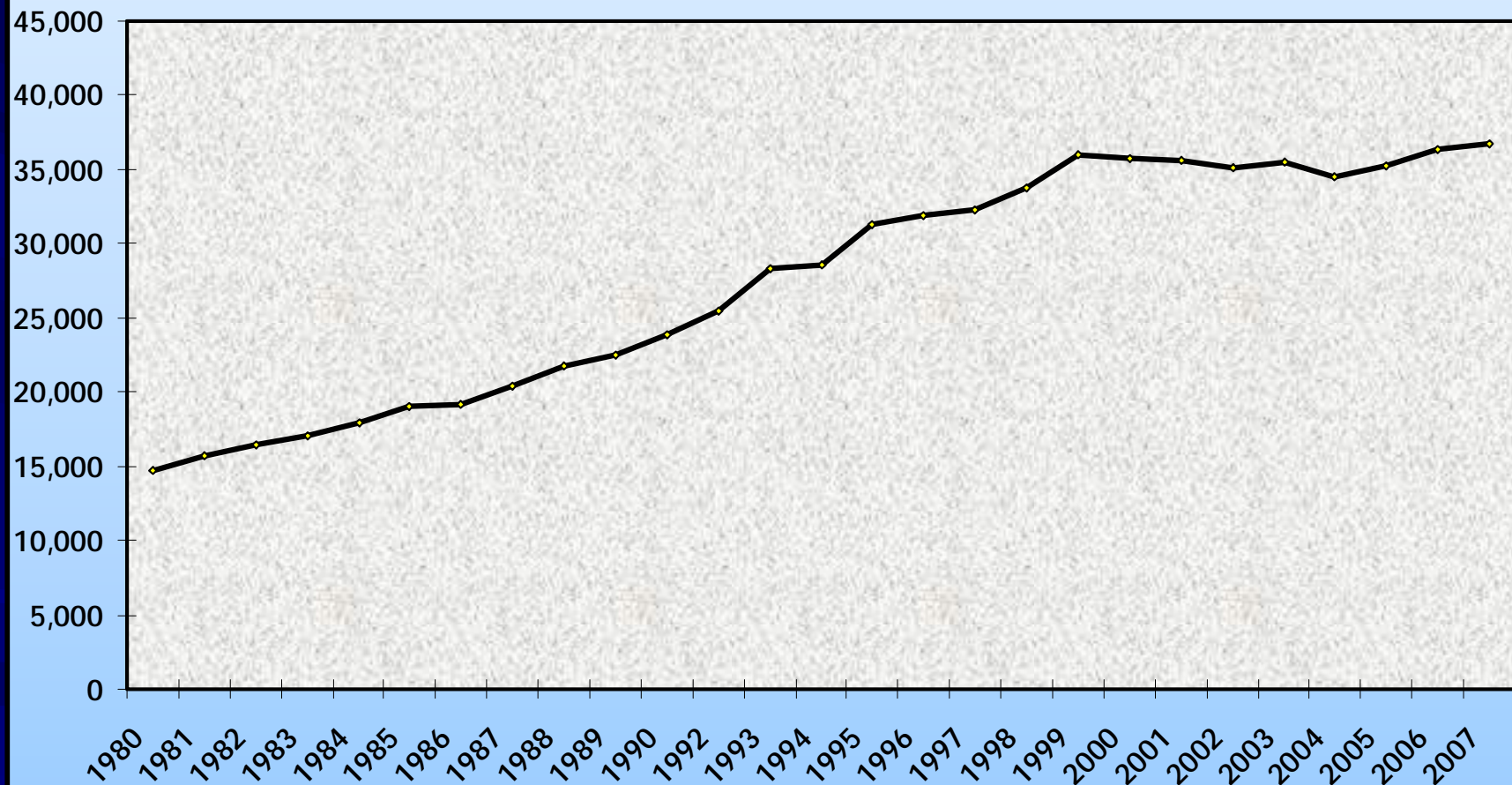
Attainment of upper secondary level education by age group, 2006



Data source: OECD (2008) Education at a Glance 2008, Indicator: A1.2a (p.43)

# Expansion of higher education

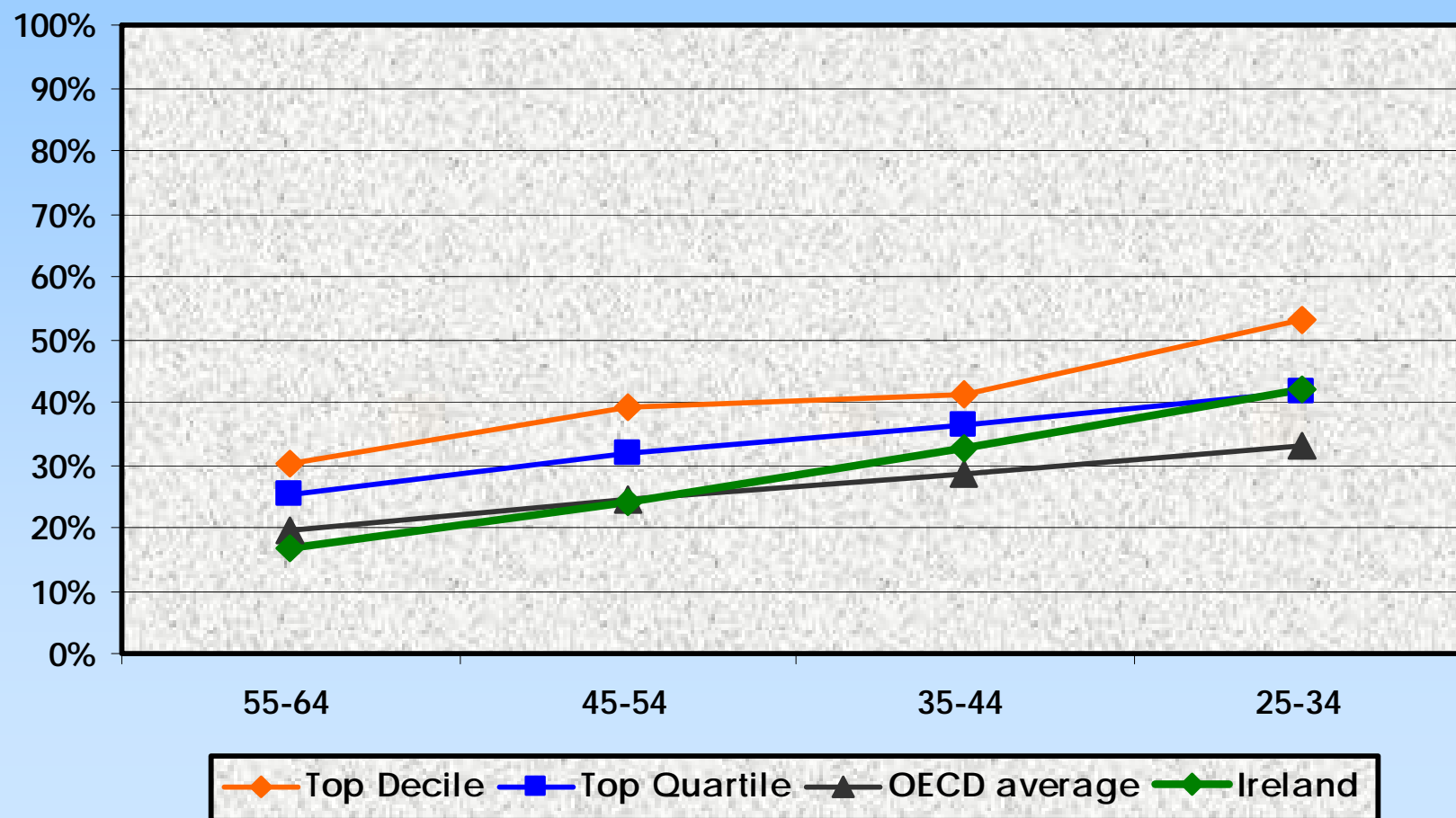
New entrants to full-time higher education, 1980 to 2007



Data source: Higher Education Authority.

# Attainment of higher education

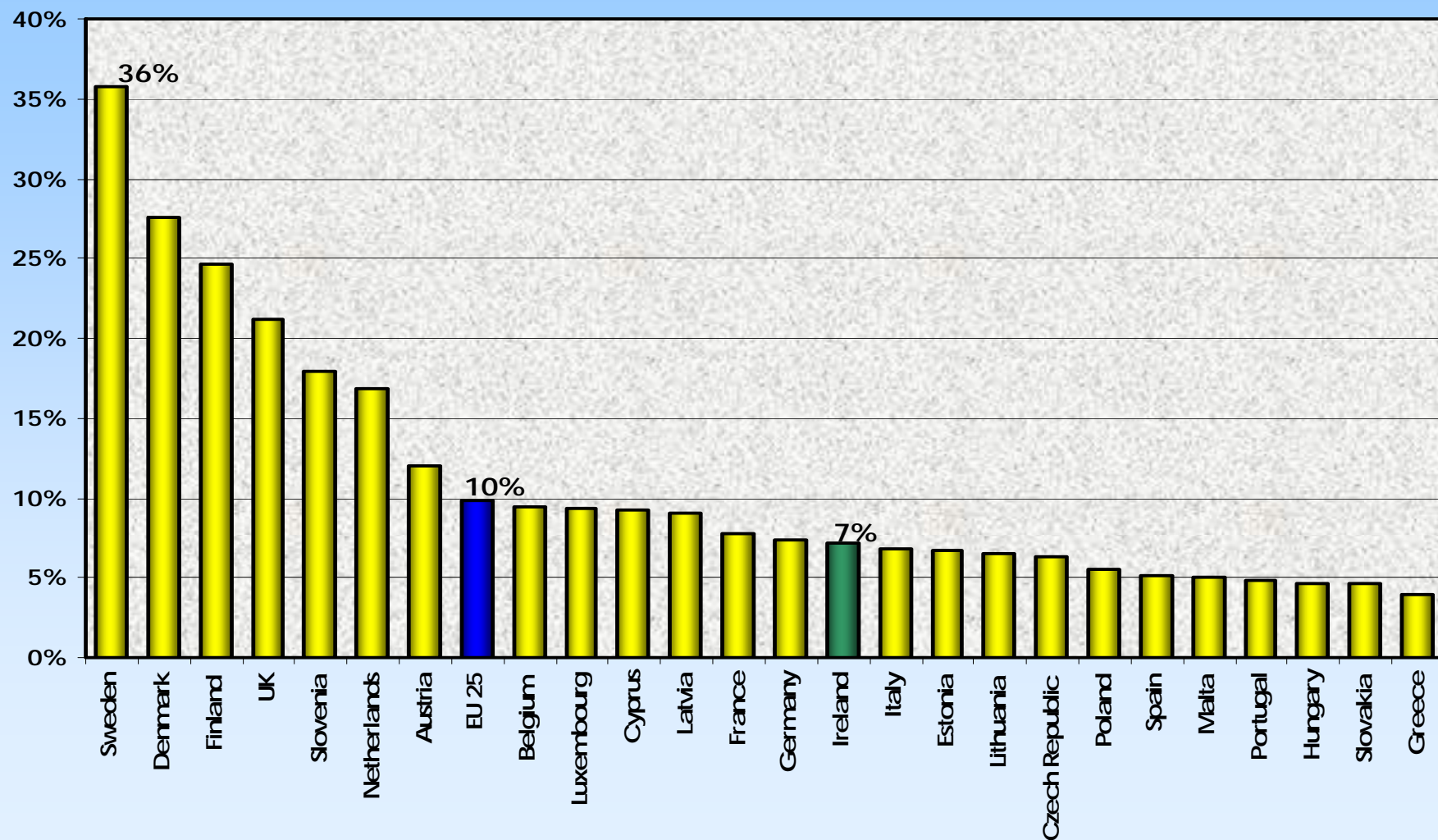
Attainment of higher education by age group, 2006



Data source: OECD (2008) Education at a Glance 2008, Indicator: A1.3a (p.44)

# Participation in lifelong learning

Participation in Lifelong Learning in the European Union, 2004



# Synopsis (1)

- Remarkable improvements in the educational profile of the Irish population over recent decades
- Greatly enhanced opportunities for high educational attainment
- Definite progress in the promotion of greater equality
- **BUT...**
- Inequalities in access to higher education persist
- Substantial sections of the population have low levels of qualifications and skills
- School completion remains a serious challenge (81-82% since 1994)
- We have had limited success in lifelong learning



## Synopsis (2)

- Education is highly valued in Ireland and is credited with our greatly improved economic circumstances over the last two decades
- It is recognised that our economic competitiveness into the future will be built around the skills and productivity of our workforce and our capacity for innovation and change

# Building capacity for change

1. Responsiveness of higher education
  - Flexibility of provision
  - New skills for a new era
2. The importance of the EU
3. A focus on system-level performance
  - Coherence of the higher education system
  - Developing a 'whole of education' approach
4. The importance of quality and equality in the context of mass participation

# Responsiveness

- The pace of change renders the future increasingly unpredictable and the key characteristic that we desire of graduates, and of the system from which they graduate, is responsiveness, or capacity for change.
- This refers to the internal responsiveness of the academy to the needs of learners and researchers
- And also to the external responsiveness of the higher education system to the key challenges of our time – social, economic, environmental and civic.

# Flexibility

- Increasingly, flexibility of provision will be a key indicator of the responsiveness of Irish higher education to Irish society.
- In order to support flexible delivery of higher education programmes, the HEA is working towards the introduction of a policy and funding framework based on transferable credit-based learning.
- This will effectively relate recurrent funding allocations to the total number of credits undertaken within an institution rather than to the total number of (full-time) students.
- In proposing this reform of our funding model, our objective is to secure parity for more flexible forms of delivering higher education.

# New skills for a new era

- Critical thinking, adaptability and creativity are key characteristics required of graduates by the labour market.
- This is best achieved by engendering in undergraduates the capacity for creativity and the enthusiasm and skills required for continual engagement with learning at advanced levels throughout their lives.
- Therefore we are looking at how we can increase the emphasis at undergraduate level on generic skills such as quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, communication skills, team-working skills and the effective use of information technology.

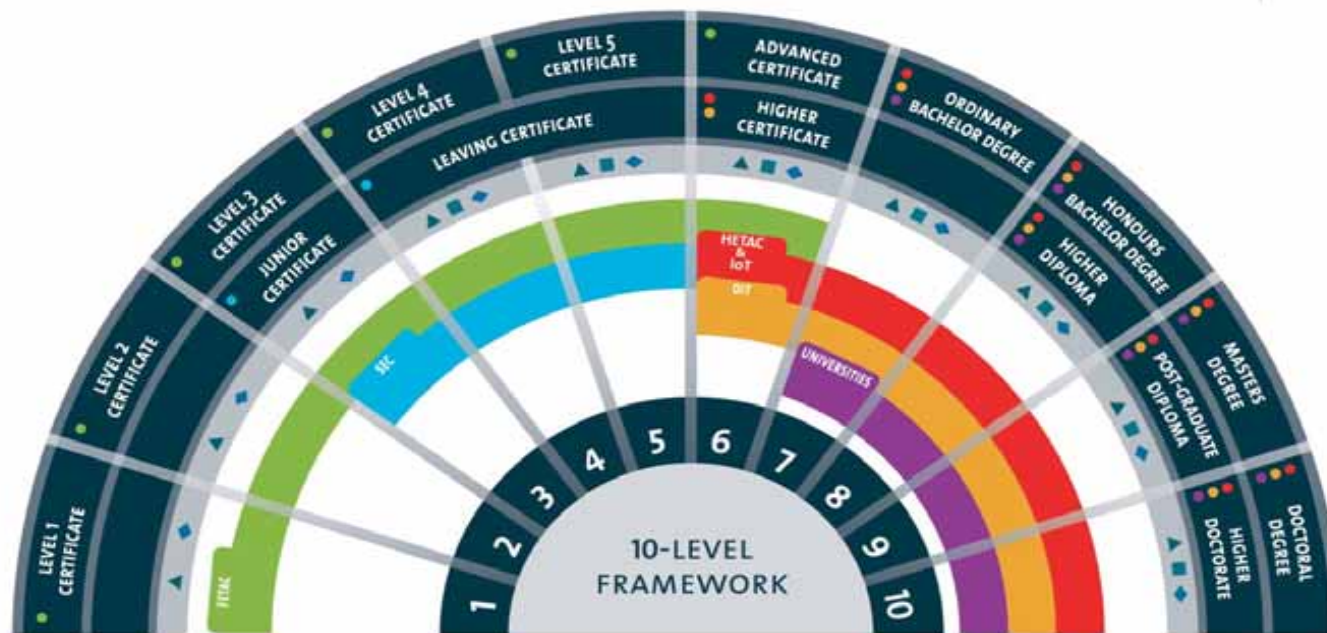
# The importance of the EU

- The EU has had a very positive impact on the development of Irish higher education
- The Bologna process, in particular, has the potential to enhance the responsiveness of higher education.
- In addition to the obvious potential of Bologna to improve mobility, the process also provides an ideal framework on which we can build greater flexibility and on which we can develop opportunities for multi-disciplinary study and inter-institutional programme delivery
- We aim to build on this potential

# National Framework of Qualifications

## NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS

Údarás Náisiúnta  
Cáilíochtaí na hÉireann  
National Qualifications  
Authority of Ireland



### AWARDING BODIES

- FITAC - Further Education and Training Awards Council
- SEC - State Examinations Commission (Department of Education & Science)
- HETAC - Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- IIT - Institutes of Technology (make their own awards at specific levels under Delegated Authority from HETAC)
- DIT - Dublin Institute of Technology
- Universities

### AWARDS IN THE FRAMEWORK

There are four types of award in the National Framework of Qualifications:

- Major Awards: are the principal class of awards made at a level
- ▲ Minor Awards: are for partial completion of the outcomes for a Major Award
- Supplemental Awards: are for learning that is additional to a Major Award
- ◆ Special Purpose Awards: are for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievement

# Quality of outcome

- The National Framework of Qualifications is a key part of the Irish strategy.
- In terms of ensuring quality of outcome...
  - Agreed learning outcomes
  - Establishing trust
  - Commonality of quality standards
- And equality of opportunity...
  - Enhancing access, transfer and progression



# System-level performance (1)

- Increasing emphasis on system-level solutions on the basis of efficiency and coherence.
  - National Framework of Qualifications
  - Central Applications Facility
  - Amalgamation of quality assurance agencies
  - Single funding agency for universities and institutes of technology
- The Irish plan is to achieve a coherent system of higher education – one that accommodates a range of institutions with distinct missions and diverse programmes.
- Critical mass is a challenge in a small country. Collaboration/co-operation and consolidation will be required to harness national expertise in particular disciplines and to build up the capacity and quality of the entire higher education system. Re-configuration is on the policy agenda.

# System-level performance (2)

- Transforming Irish higher education from a set of isolated institutions into a coherent, efficient and dynamic system of higher education will require a supportive policy and funding eco-system and a transparent and robust accountability framework that incorporates an emphasis on outputs and outcomes.
- It's particularly important that the funding incentives in the allocation model correspond to explicit national priorities
- We cherish academic freedom, the spirit of enquiry and higher education's role as a source of independent insight into matters that impact on our society
- But academic freedom should not be interpreted as complete institutional autonomy and institutional autonomy should not undermine the coherence and effectiveness of the higher education system

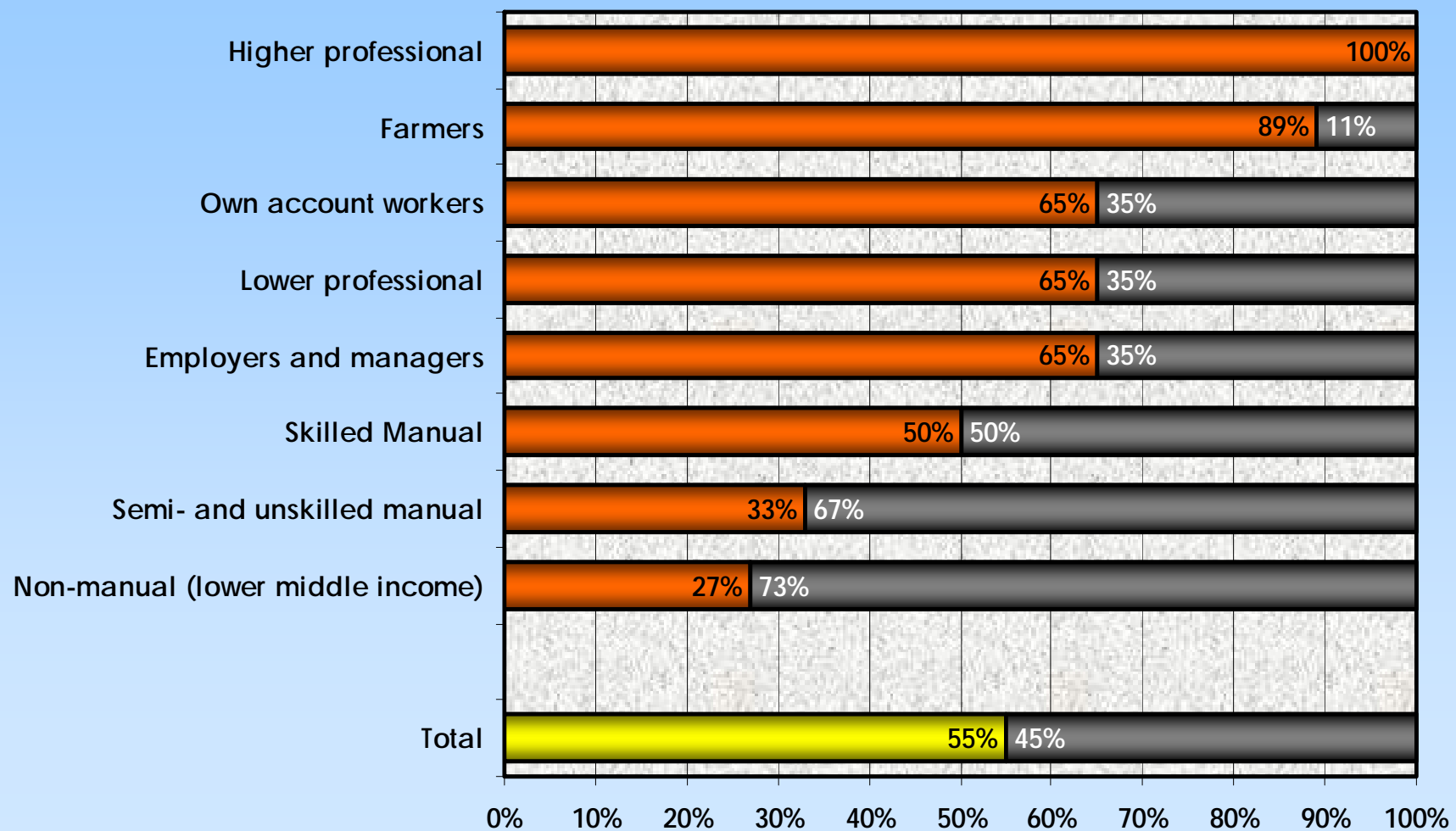
# A 'whole of education' approach

- The graduate is the product of the entire education system.
- Therefore, it will be important to ensure complementarity and consistency in the skills and aptitudes that are nurtured and developed at all levels of education.
- This will assist in the development and implementation of 'whole of education' strategies for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning

# Equality and quality in the context of 'mass participation'

# Inequalities at the point of entry

Entry rates to higher education by socio-economic group, 2004



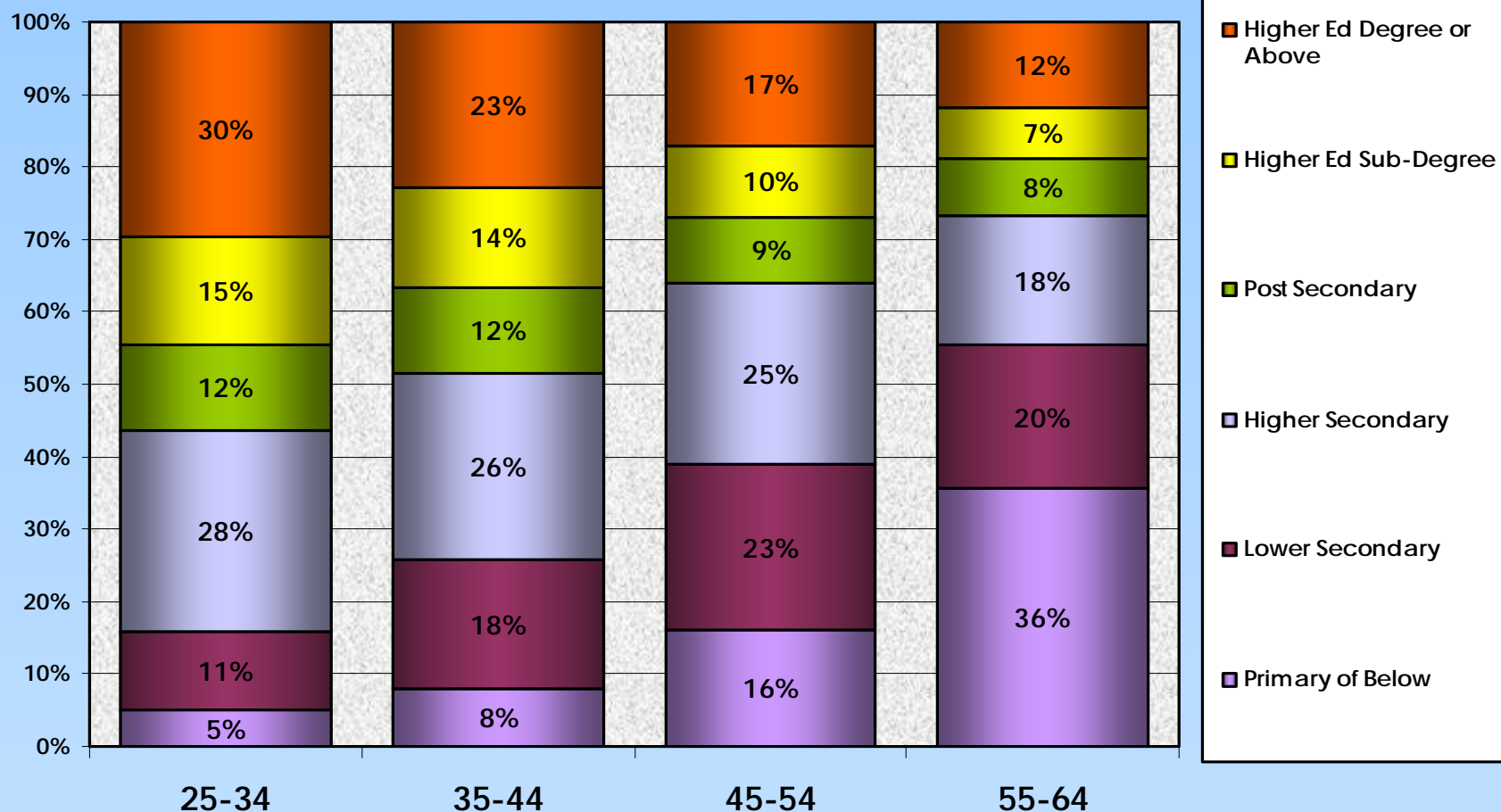
Data source: ESRI / Fitzpatrick's 2004 data

# Equity and excellence (eQUALITY)

- The international evidence indicates that those societies (and education systems) which achieve the highest levels of equity also achieve the highest levels of **excellence** (Ref. PISA studies and Danish 2005 study *Explaining Student Performance*)
- Quality is not undermined by equality
- Inequality poses a far greater threat to quality
- This illustrates the interdependence of our national social and economic objectives

# The term “mass higher education” should not make us complacent

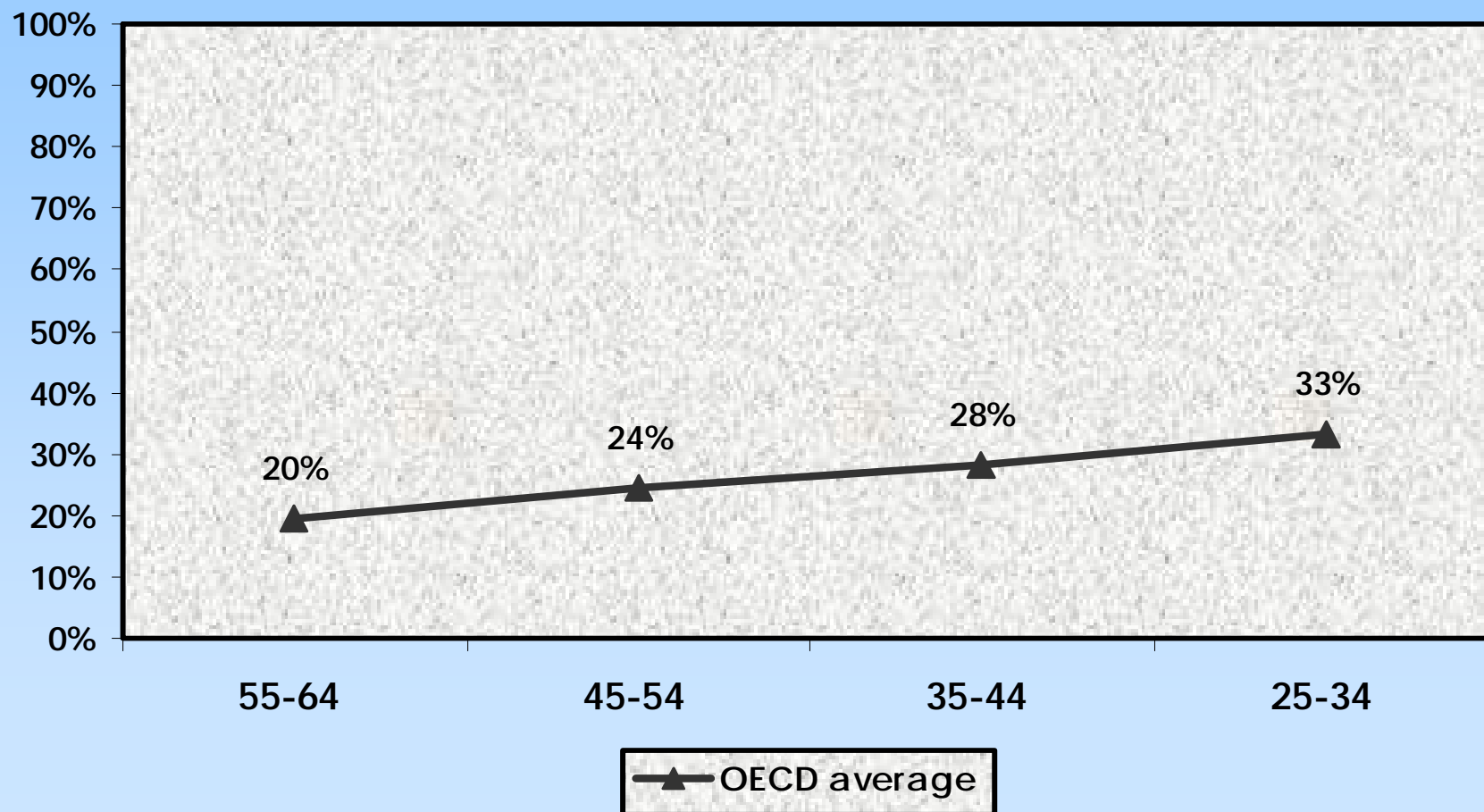
Educational attainment profile of Irish adults, 2008



Data source: Central Statistics Office (Ireland), Quarterly National Household Survey, Q2 2008

# A high water mark?

Attainment of higher education by age group, 2006



Data source: OECD (2008) Education at a Glance 2008, Indicator: A1.3a (p.44)



# Learning our way forwards

- The levels of participation, to which we now aspire, are unprecedented
- New and innovative approaches will be needed to bring increasing numbers of citizens up to the skill levels and competence levels associated with high levels of educational achievement
- Improvements in the quality and policy-relevance of our administrative data will be essential and research will be vital for the development of effective strategies, for sharing good practice and for learning our way forwards
- *“Complex adaptive problems require adaptive leadership”* (Heifetz)

*“The plan is nothing;  
the planning is everything”*

(Eisenhower)