

Statement on Education and Training

Don Thornhill, Chair



National
Competitiveness
Council



Why the NCC and Education policy?

- ▶ *Positive educational outcomes are vital to enhancing our competitiveness and to ensuring economic recovery. We need to be prepared in order to benefit from international economic recovery.*

What is competitiveness? A race to the top, not to the bottom

- ▶ *Competitiveness encompasses all those factors which impact on the ability of firms in Ireland to compete on international markets in a way which provides our people with the opportunity to improve their quality of life.*

Role of the National Competitiveness Council



- ▶ *Benchmarking Ireland's Performance*

- ▶ *Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge*



- ▶ *Statement on Education & Training*

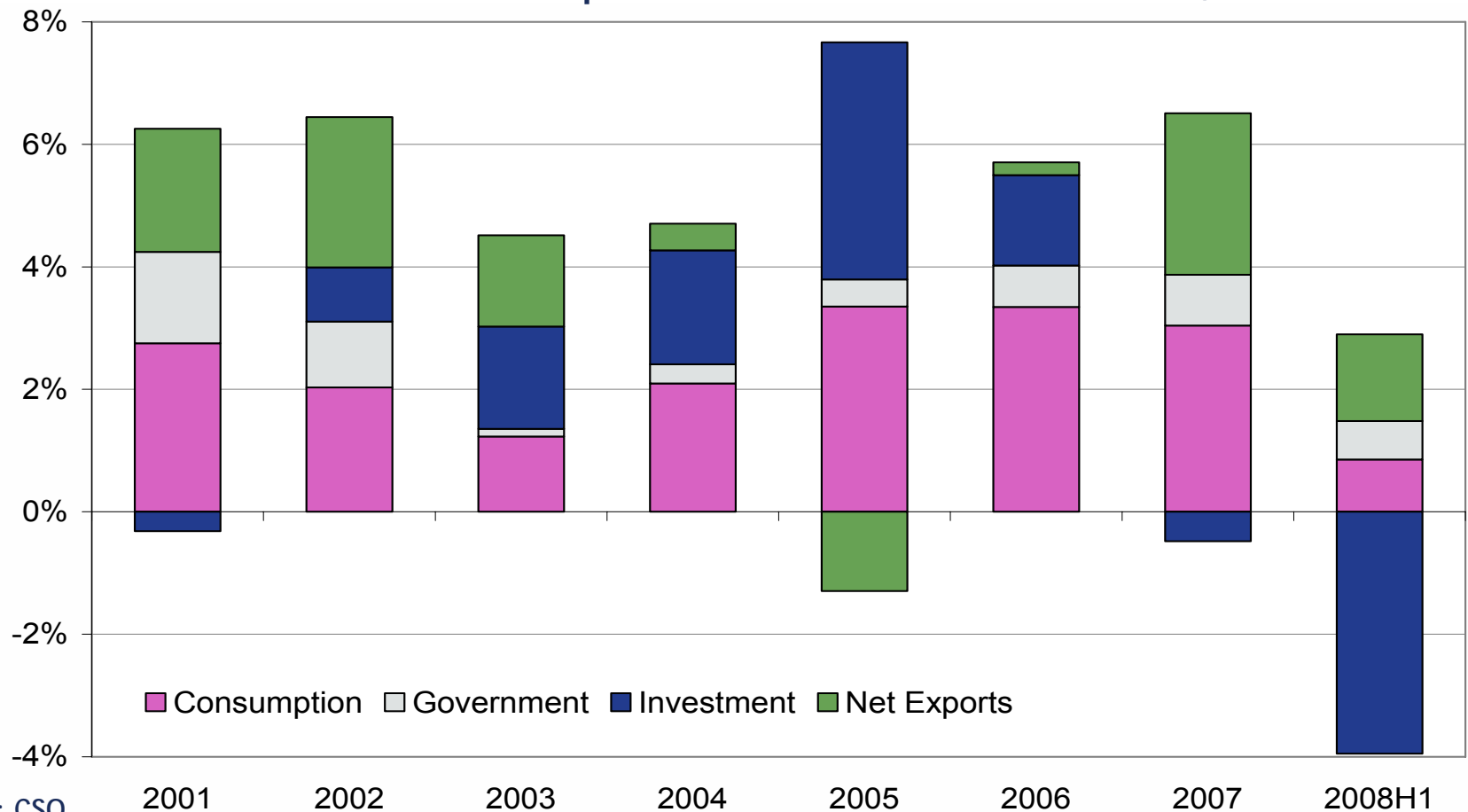


A Challenging Landscape

- ▶ We have been losing competitiveness since 2005
- ▶ We need to improve our educational outcomes...
- ▶ But, the public finances are severely strained.
- ▶ Increased expenditure on education is not the answer to current challenges

Challenge - to ensure that we are sufficiently competitive to enable a transition back to Export Led Growth

Contribution of Net Exports to Irish Economic Growth, 2001-2008

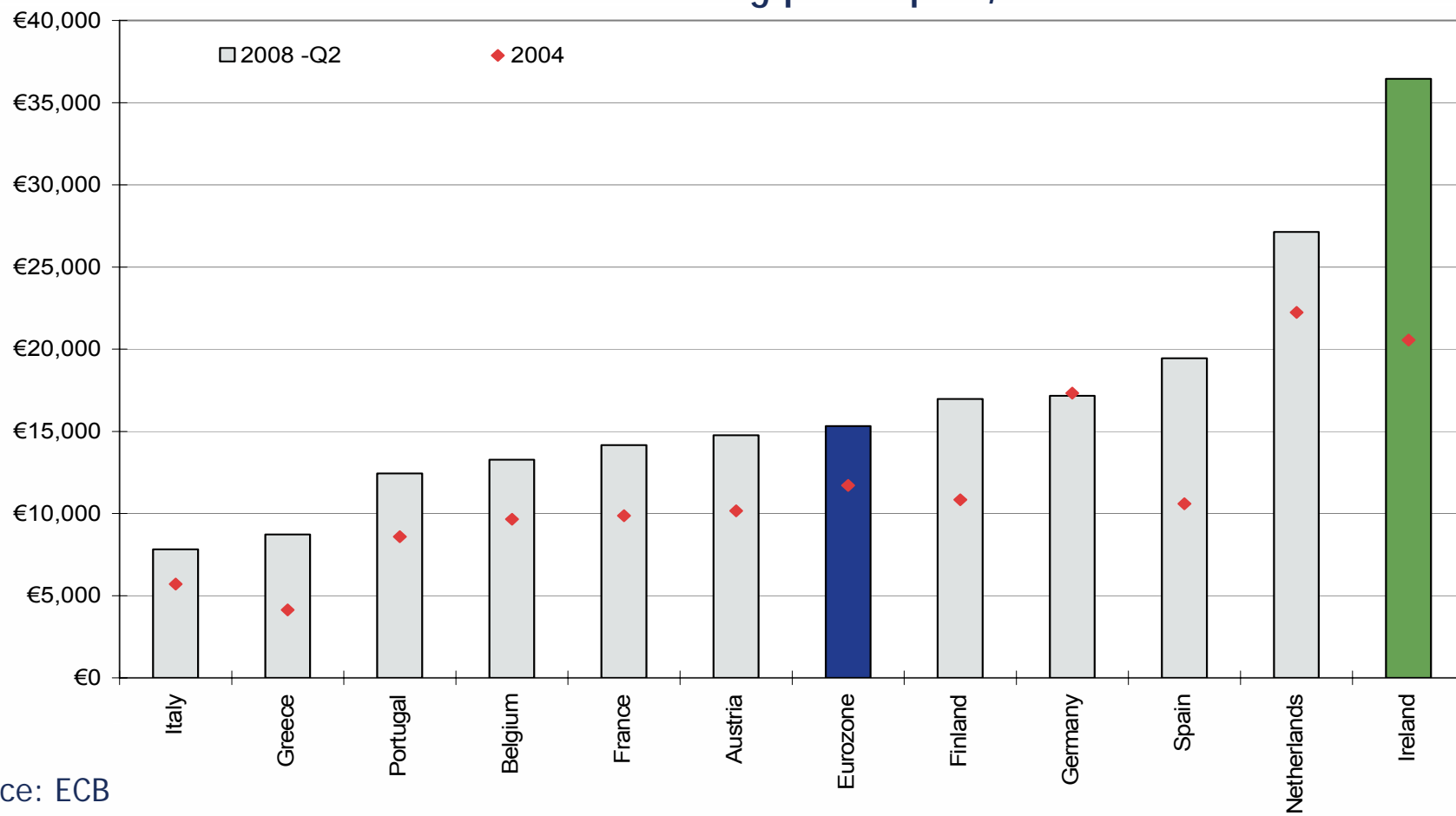


There is no return to domestic led growth

Our debt burden grew quickly and we are now highly indebted

Household Borrowing per Capita, 2008

Household Borrowing per Capita, 2008-Q2





Education

A transcending area of policy and concern

- ▶ Social
- ▶ Moral, ethical and religious
- ▶ Societal and personal
- ▶ Culturaland
- ▶ Economic

Not either or, but all



The Contextual Challenges

- ▶ The commitment and skills of our educators and the support of parents and students have made strong outcomes possible with limited resources
- ▶ Our policymakers and educators must be ambitious and continue to strive for the best outcomes for students
- ▶ Stark fiscal realities - flexibility required to ensure that our education system continues to improve the quality of learning
- ▶ Reform is never easy... but now is essential

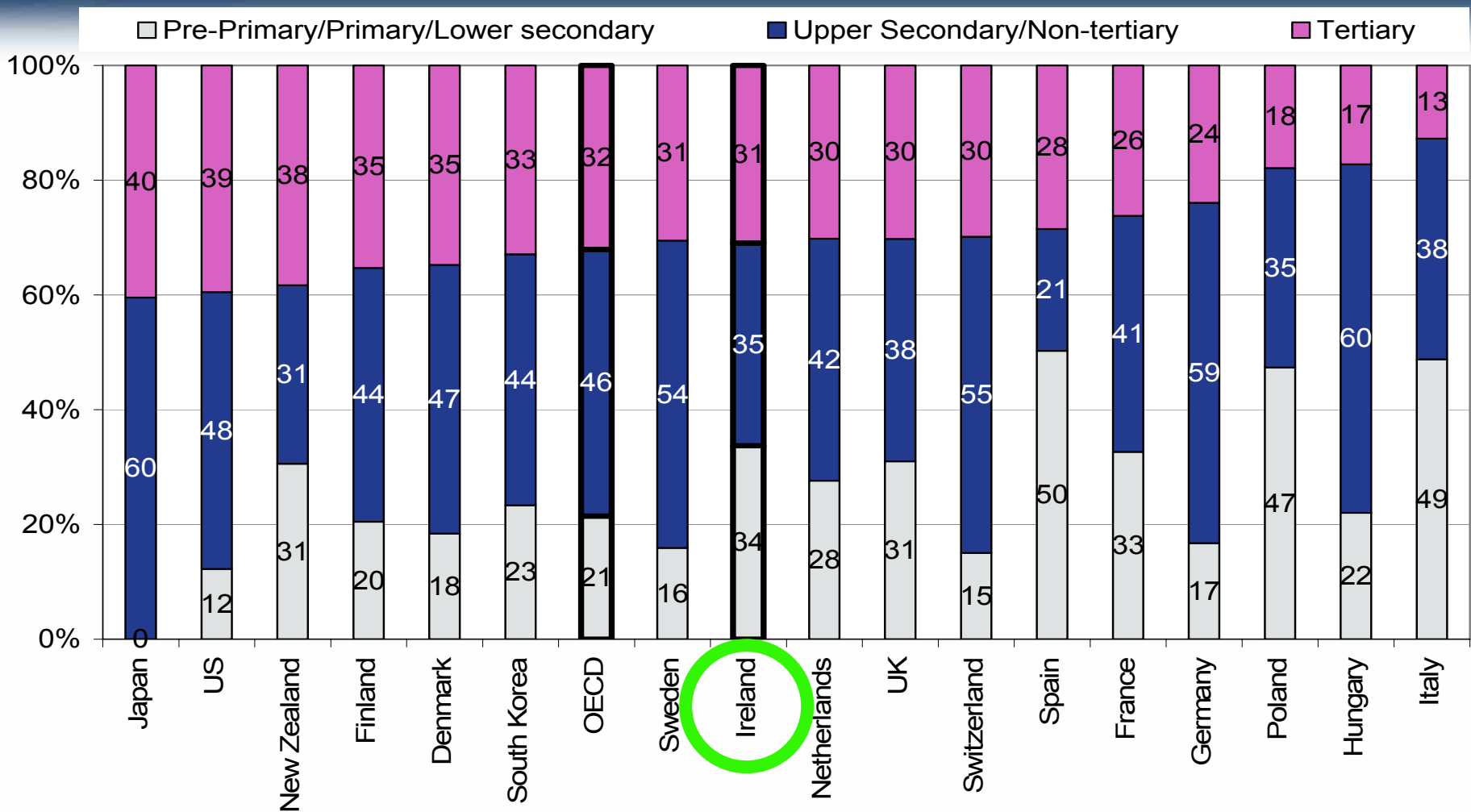


How do we compare?

International comparisons

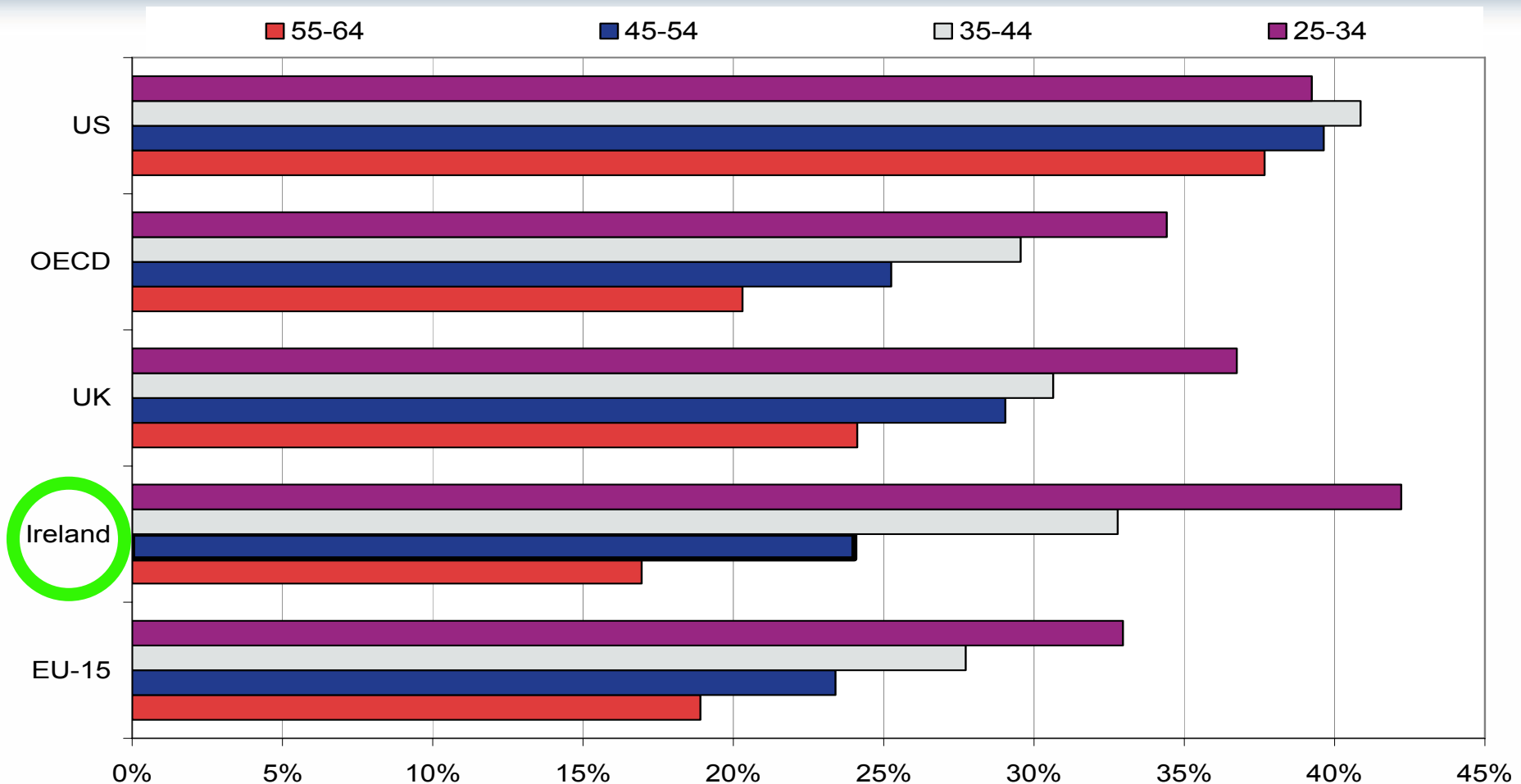
Educational Attainment, Aged 25-64

by Highest Level of Education (percent), 2006



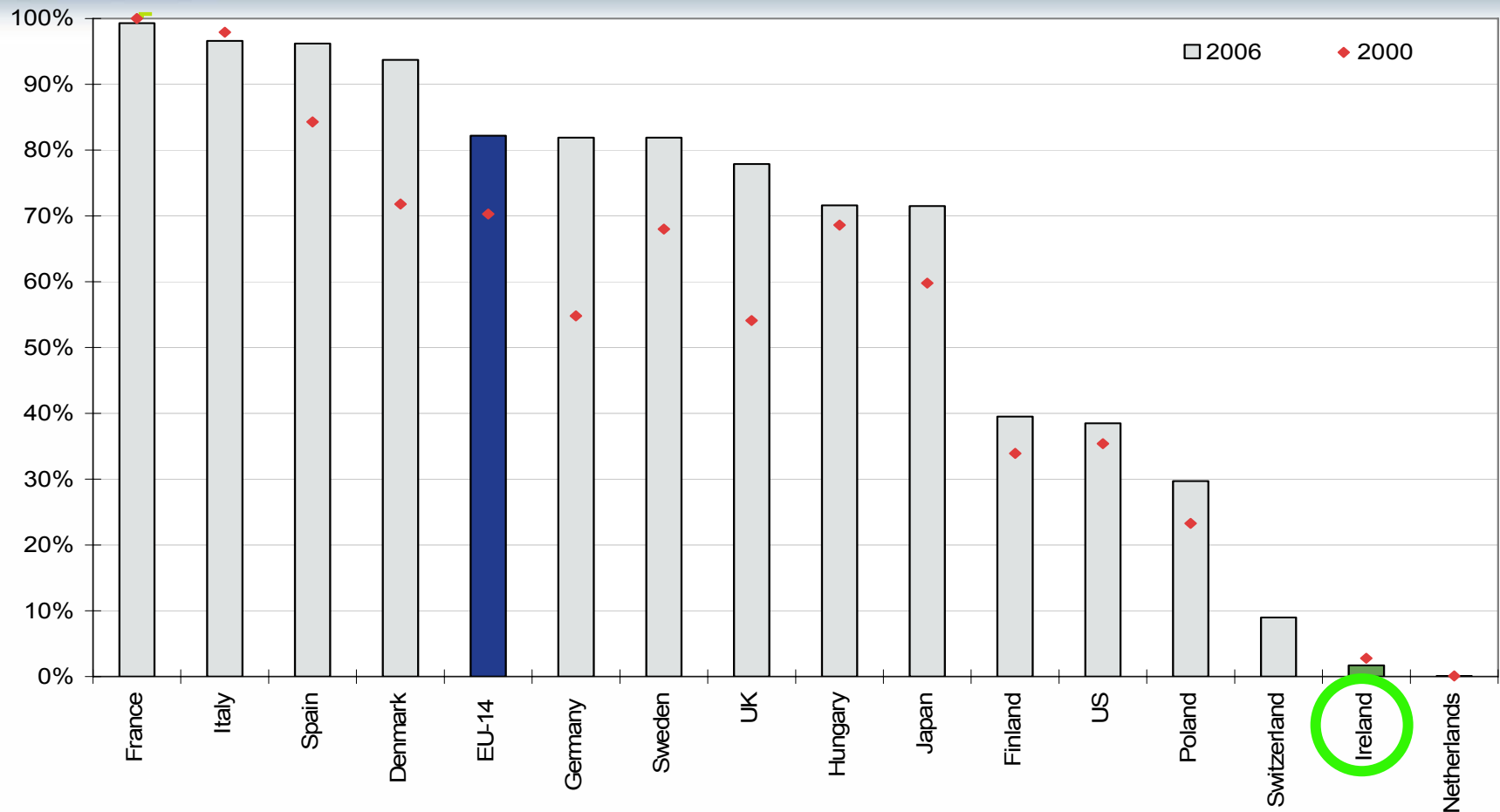
Population with a Third Level Education

By Age Cohort, 2006



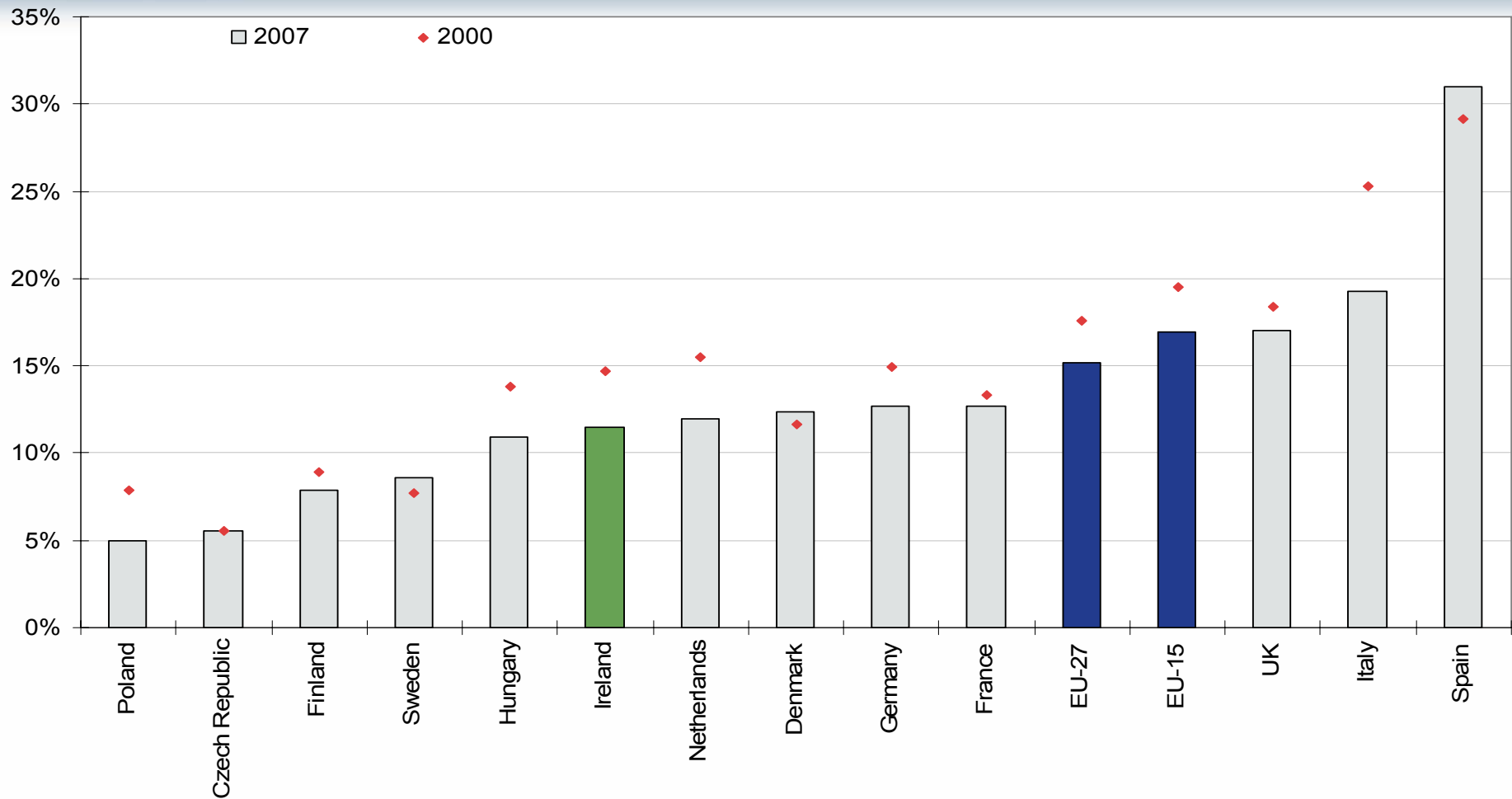
Participants at Pre-primary, Aged 3 years

As a percent of population aged 3, 2006

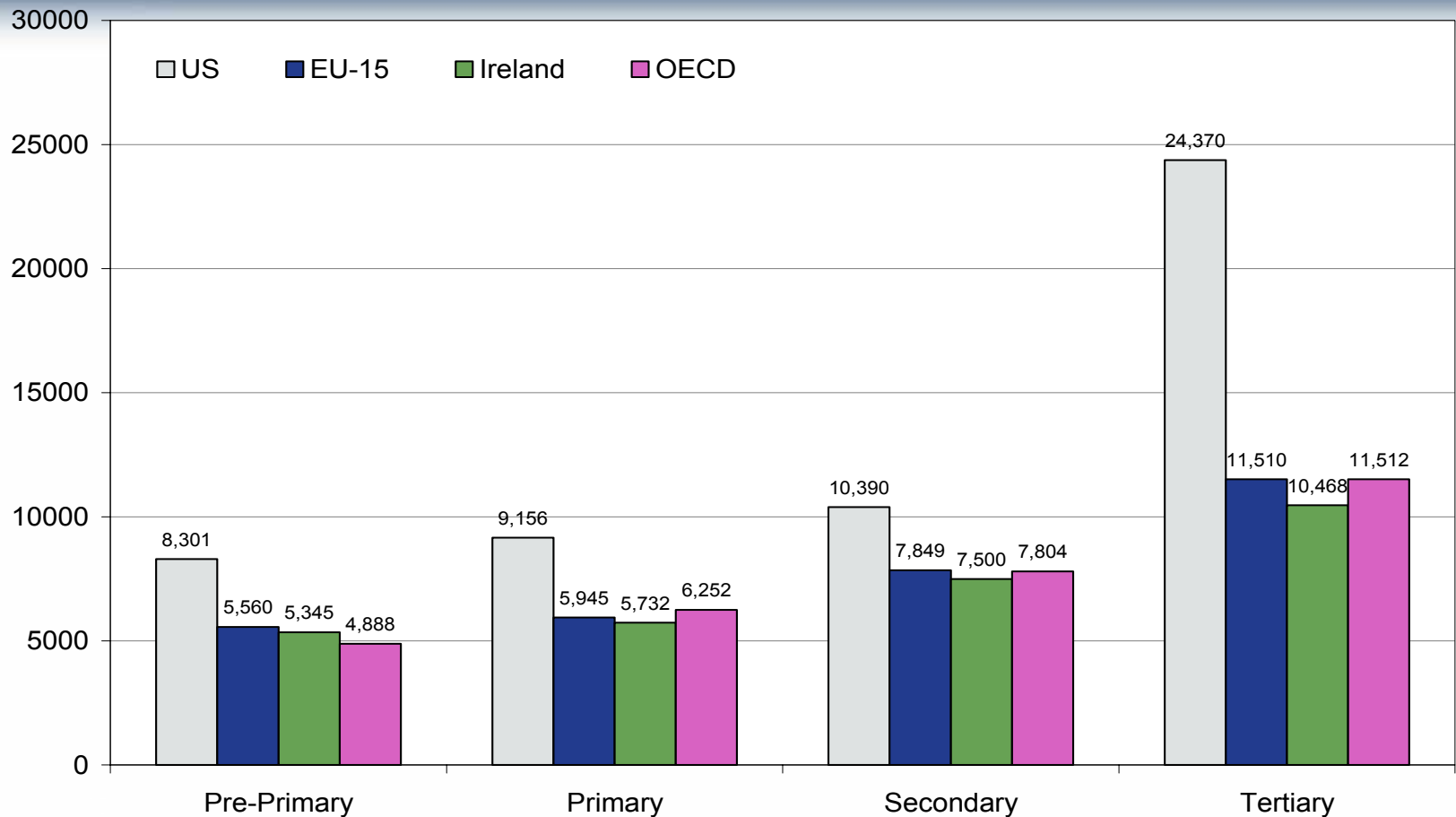


Early School Leavers

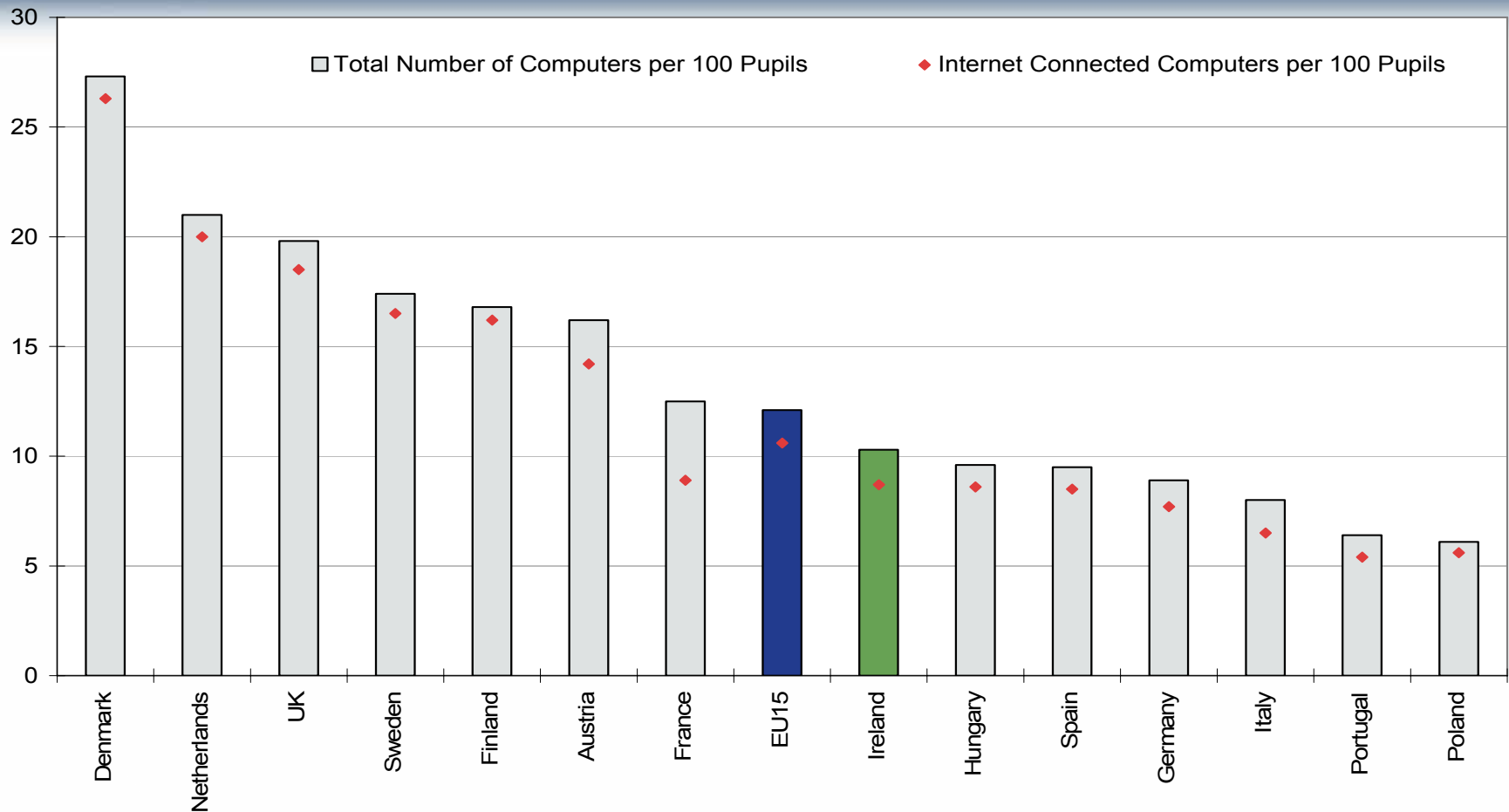
Aged 18-24, 2007



Investment: Expenditure per Student

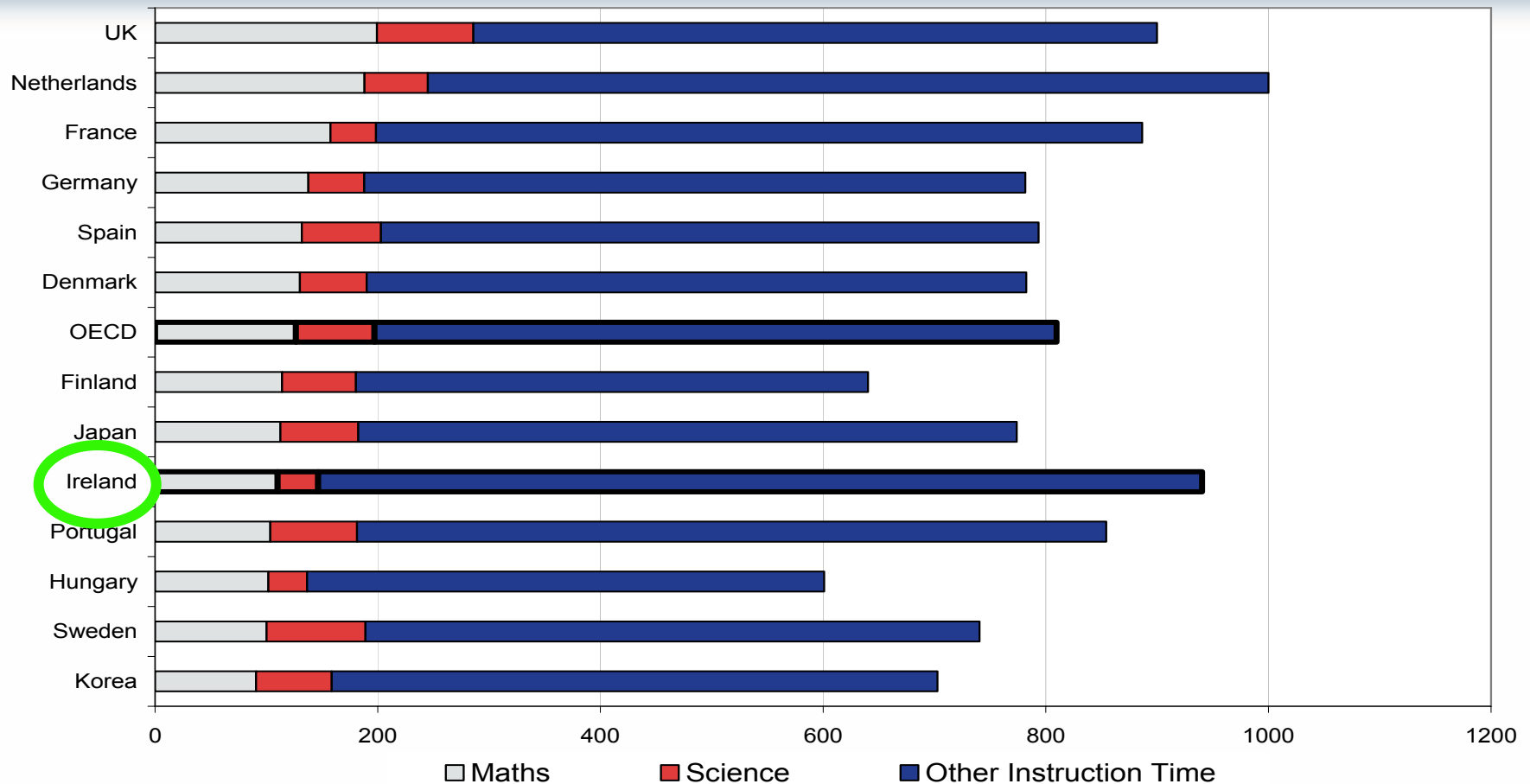


Integrating ICT to Enliven Learning



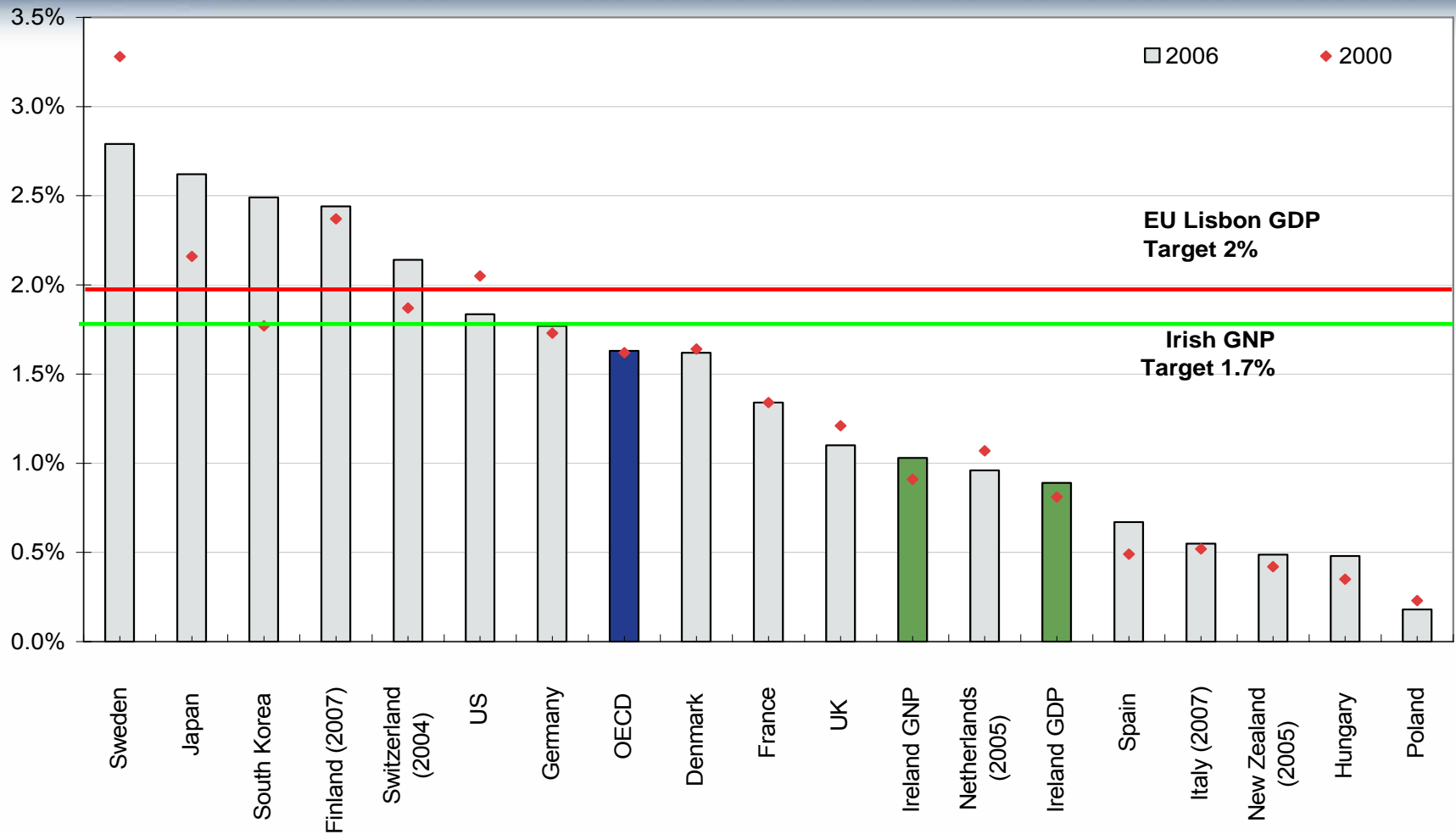
Tuition hours for Mathematics and Science

9-11 year olds, 2006



Fourth Level R&D

Business Expenditure on R&D as a % of GDP, 2006





Recommendations

Key Skills for the Future

- ▶ Critical thinking, self-directed learning, communication and influencing skills, team work
- ▶ Implementation of the *Strategy for ICT in Schools* is vital
- ▶ Maths, Science, Engineering, Computing key to enterprise
- ▶ Stock of mathematical capability has shown no improvement in recent years
- ▶ *Project Maths* should address some of the problems with curriculum & low interest but can more be done?
- ▶ Increase dedicated time for science and mathematics
- ▶ Teaching time, Quality of teachers, Perceived difficulty of Leaving Cert Honours Maths

Targeting Disadvantage

- ▶ Complex issue: intertwining social, cultural and economic factors many of which are outside the control of teachers, schools/colleges and Government
- ▶ *National Skills Strategy:*
 - 94 % completion rate at second level
 - 72 % progression to third level by 2020
- ▶ Ireland will have to make further progress in breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage.

Long-Term Development of Pre-Primary System is Critical

- ▶ Stronger early interventions can address disadvantage and improve performance at later stages
- ▶ Link expenditures to the rollout of national quality standards for providers
- ▶ Replace *Early Years Supplement* with a targeted subsidy to drive quality standards
- ▶ Quality service implies lower child-to-staff ratios than other age-groups and well-trained providers
- ▶ Move towards an integrated system combining education with centre-based day-care at the same location

Disadvantage in Schools

- ▶ While schools alone cannot solve deep-rooted societal problems, there is a need to ensure that the programmes in place are as effective as possible
- ▶ Too many pupils leave primary schools with very low levels of reading ability and a poor grasp of basic mathematical concepts
- ▶ Appraise effectiveness of the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) programme
- ▶ Protect provision of language support for the children of recent immigrants



Improving the Delivery of Education

- ▶ Schools responded well to the changes in the Irish economy and society in recent decades, particularly in terms of accommodating rapid increases in student participation
- ▶ Need for continuing adaptation to changing nature of skills and global competition
- ▶ Need to remain open to reforms focussed on improving the quality of the learning experience that our students receive



Focus on Outcomes

- ▶ Funding levels are important, but there are improvements we can make that do not cost. They may even save money.
- ▶ Lack of concrete evidence that lower teacher-pupil ratios enhance student outcomes, except for very young children
- ▶ Excessive focus on class size deflects scarce resources
 - e.g. professional development of teachers, school buildings, science labs etc.

Teacher Quality is Fundamental

- ▶ Excellent teachers have the ability to stimulate and endow their students with a love of learning
- ▶ We attract very good candidates into teaching but limited mechanisms exist to share best practice
- ▶ Professional and in-service development should be frequent, continuing and progressive during a teacher's career and not limited to introduction of new syllabi; a coherent approach is required; important role for the Teaching Council
- ▶ Teachers need opportunities to develop their skills and to benefit from collaboration with colleagues



Identifying and Rewarding Excellence

- ▶ Performance standards are not well defined or monitored at teacher level
- ▶ Outstanding teachers are often not recognised for their excellence and should be rewarded through the promotion system
- ▶ It is important for Ireland to participate in a wider range of international assessments



Enhancing Leadership within Schools

- ▶ Burden of legislative compliance falls disproportionately on principals
- ▶ While principals should be accountable for their performance, too much time is consumed with administrative returns
- ▶ Value in reviewing the role and responsibilities of principals and the system of administration in schools
 - Need for effective middle management structures
- ▶ Need to allow principals and teachers to focus on learning outcomes

Autonomy in School Funding

- ▶ Enable principals to distribute responsibility and tasks to those best qualified to assist in running the school effectively
- ▶ Greater autonomy for schools and principals in deciding how to allocate funding in line with the needs of their school could enhance the efficacy of school funding.
- ▶ Incentive funding could be made available to schools where they meet or exceed agreed outcome targets



Enhancing Higher Level Education

- ▶ Challenge is to continue improving the quality and relevance of education that students receive while expanding access further
- ▶ Vital to set an agreed vision for Performance, Revenue Generation and Autonomy
- ▶ Enable leading institutions and academics to compete with the best in the world.
- ▶ All institutions should build on their strengths differentiate their activities on the basis of national, regional and sectoral needs

Value of Diverse Missions

- ▶ Greater specialisation, amalgamation of courses among Irish institutions and greater cooperation both locally and internationally required to reach critical mass
- ▶ Distinct role of the Institutes of Technology in the provision of higher education should be maintained and strengthened
- ▶ Rationalisation agenda should be carefully examined as part of the *Higher Education Strategy Review* process

Sustainable Sources of Funding


- ▶ Current arrangements are no longer sufficient to meet the funding needs of higher education institutions on a sustainable basis
- ▶ Appropriate and equitable that graduates, who will benefit in terms of increased earnings over their life, should contribute a portion of the cost of their education
 - This does not require the introduction of upfront tuition fees
- ▶ Measures to increase contributions from graduates or students must not create new barriers to participation

Sustainable Sources of Funding

- ▶ Important that additional private funding would supplement a sustainable level of income for HEIs from the State
- ▶ Review Student Maintenance Grant

Value for Money

- ▶ NCC supports the new funding model being introduced by the HEA which includes significant strategically oriented and performance related incentives
- ▶ Current system of recruitment into academic careers does not offer a well-structured entry-route with clearly defined expectations and incentive structures for young PhD graduates
- ▶ Introduction of “tenure track” system?



Higher Education as a Direct Source of Foreign Earnings

- ▶ Proactive and consistent system of policy support needed across Government
- ▶ Departments and agencies to promote Irish HEIs abroad and to attract overseas students

Further Education and Training

- ▶ Critical that courses reoriented to meet the needs of sectors with potential for future employment growth
- ▶ FÁS, the Institutes of Technology and further education and training providers need to develop viable alternatives courses for those school leavers previously attracted into the construction industry



Implementation of the *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation*

- ▶ SSTI central to future economic success
“marathon not a sprint”
- ▶ While the institutional and professional incentives driving research excellence are important, quality undergraduate teaching must continue to be given equal recognition and incentives

SSTI: Securing Value Added

- ▶ Need effective mechanism for knowledge transfer and application through commercialisation and people



Through...

- ▶ Placements: adding entrepreneurial skills to scientific expertise
- ▶ Professional masters programmes for science disciplines
- ▶ Business-related modules for PhD degrees
- ▶ Clustering of graduate education around centres of excellence



Building a Culture of Up-Skilling

- ▶ While younger cohorts of the Irish population have benefited from the rapid increase in participation in tertiary education, older cohorts of the Irish workforce remain less qualified than the OECD average
- ▶ Career jobs are scarcer and individuals experience more frequent changes in jobs over the working life



Building a Culture of Up-Skilling

- ▶ Irish education and training system must increasingly cater for the needs of those already in the workforce
- ▶ Obstacles are considerable
- ▶ NSS targets challenging: how to attract those with lower skill levels?

Building a Culture of Up-Skilling

- ▶ The provision of workplace based training, which is fitted around working hours, needs to be actively promoted.
- ▶ Third level fees anomaly
 - While full time students receive free fees, part time students are required to pay
- ▶ Information: Adult Career Guidance
- ▶ Address challenges of improving adult literacy



In Summary

- ▶ Education central to national social and economic progress - to ensure that Ireland continuously becomes a better place in which to live and work
- ▶ Effectiveness and accountability essential
- ▶ Reform is difficult and requires flexibility and focus from all stakeholders
- ▶ Vital role of teachers



Finally... A Personal View

- ▶ Education is the most important gateway and route to personal and societal opportunity and wellbeing
- ▶ Should we settle for anything less than aiming to have the best education system in the world?

Thank You

Don Thornhill
ncc@forfas.ie



National
Competitiveness
Council

