



OECD Initiative on Assessing Higher Education Learning Outcomes

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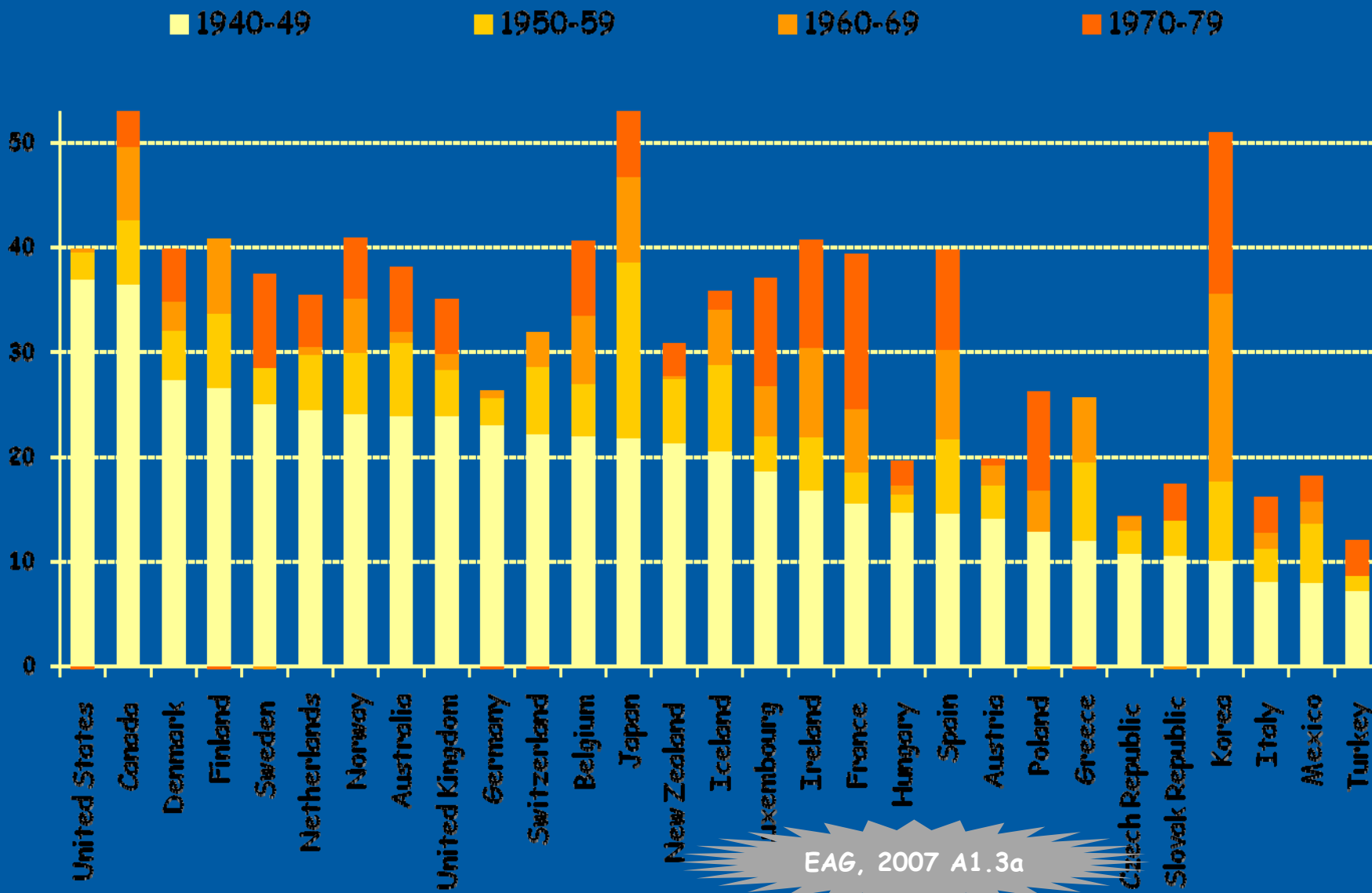
CHEA International Commission

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Tertiary education is growing ...
but in some places much faster
than others

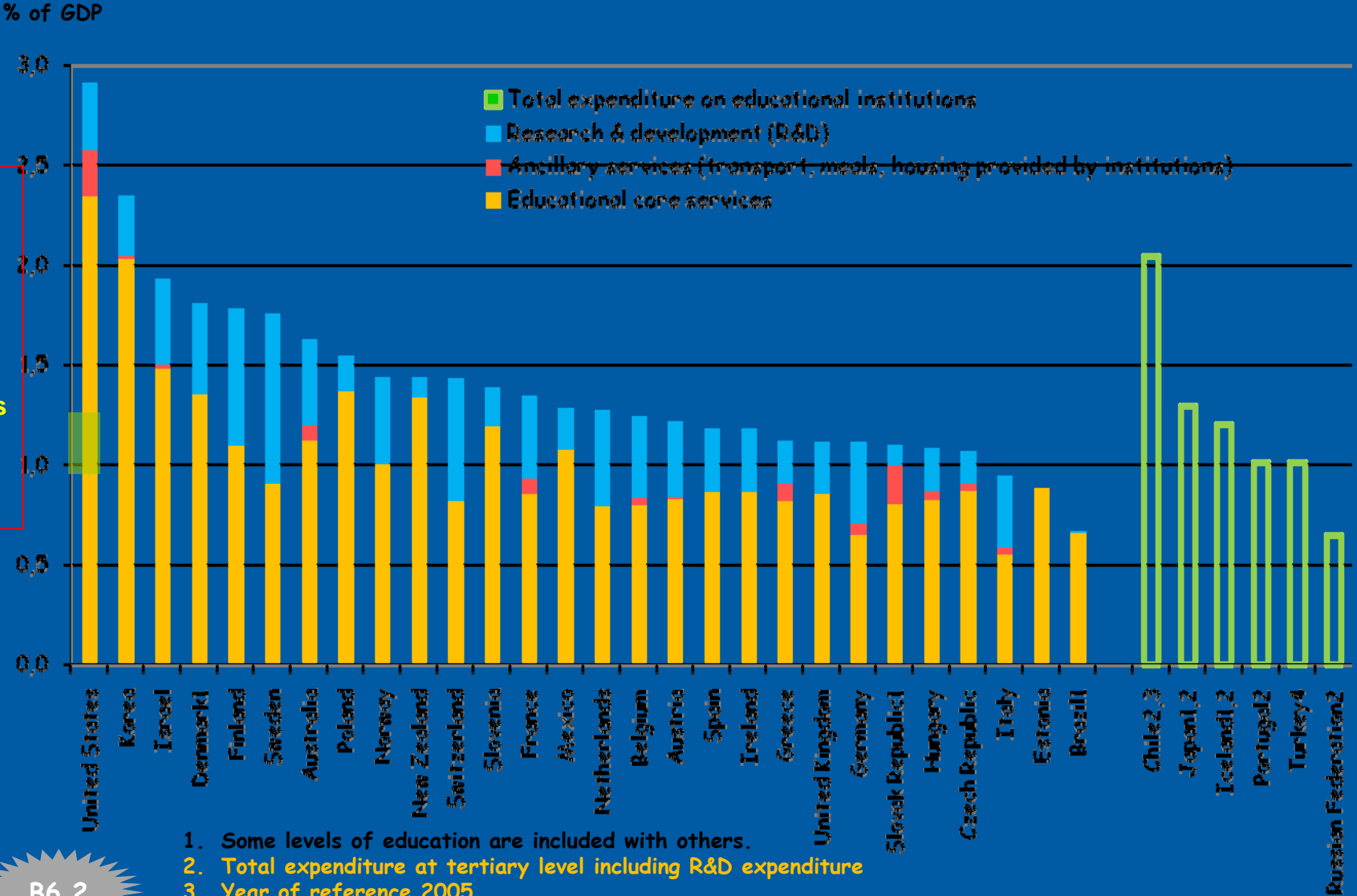
Growth in all tertiary qualifications

The percentage of persons with a minimum of 2 years of tertiary education born in the period shown below (2005)



Tertiary education is
expensive...but in some places
more so than in others

Expenditure on educational core services, R&D and ancillary services in higher education institutions as a percentage of GDP (2004)

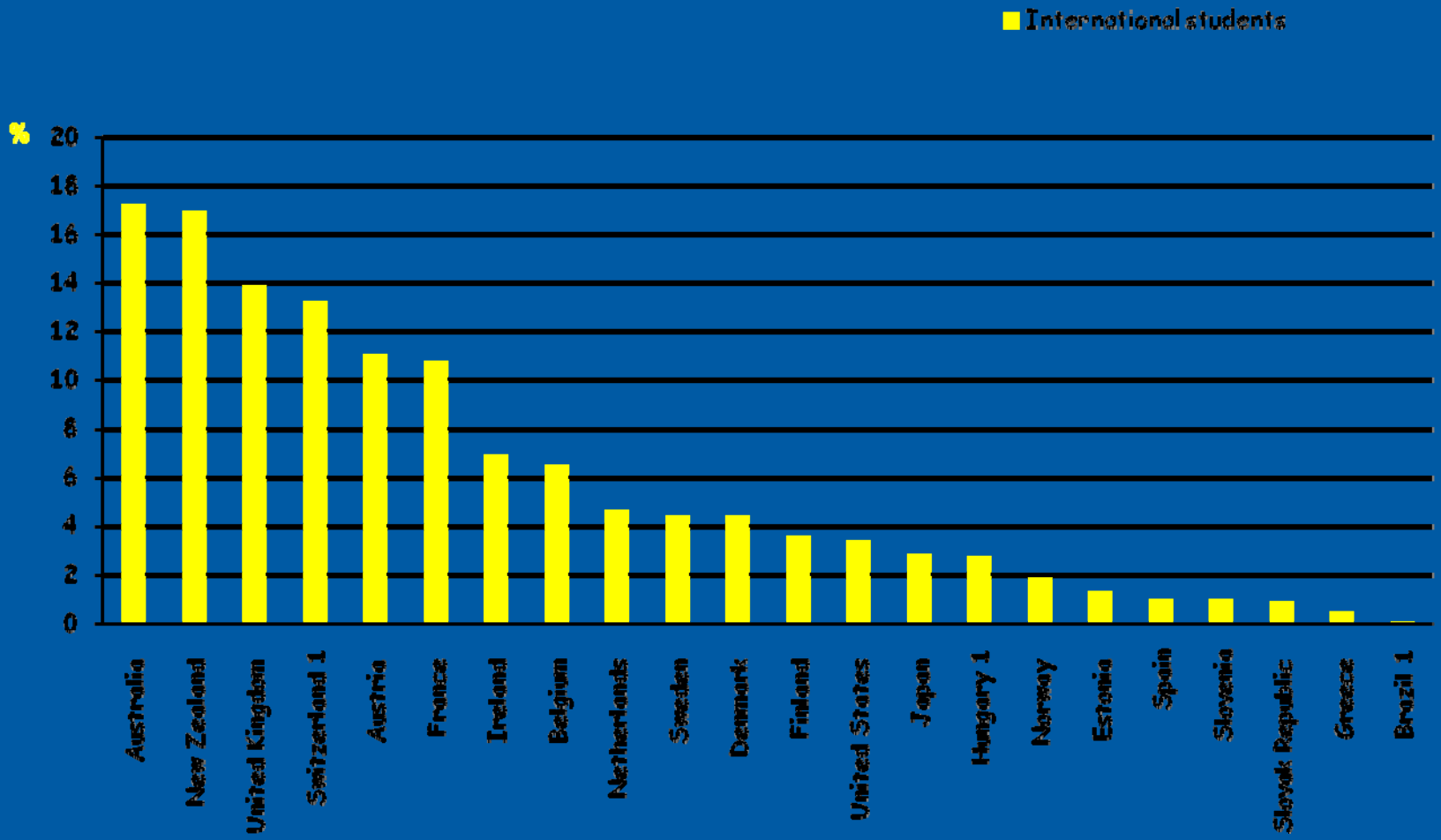


1. Some levels of education are included with others.
2. Total expenditure at tertiary level including R&D expenditure
3. Year of reference 2005.
4. Total expenditure at tertiary level excluding R&D expenditure

Higher education is becoming
an increasingly international
concern ... especially in the
English-speaking countries

Student mobility in tertiary education (2005)

Percentage of international students enrolled in tertiary education



C3.1

Note: The data on the mobility of international students presented are not comparable with data on foreign students in tertiary education (defined on the basis of citizenship) presented in pre-2006 editions of Education at a Glance .

Why the focus on outcomes?

- Development and impact of PISA
- Development and impact of international rankings of universities
- OECD Education Ministers meeting in Athens June 2006
 - From quantity to quality

Some international drivers

- Europe: the Bologna Process; the development of learning outcomes; the ‘Tuning’ project
- Japan and Korea: loss of confidence in the quality of higher education
- China: demand from consumers and those advising them
- Australia: the development of an export industry

Some national drivers - USA

- Developed demand for relevant customer information (e.g. US News and World Report)
- The Spellings Commission: accreditation in question; focus on accountability, access, affordability
- Strong culture of testing and assessment: e.g. the Collegiate Learning Assessment; National Survey of Student Engagement

OECD: Three experts' meetings

- Washington: the desirability of an OECD international assessment of higher education learning outcomes
- Paris: the conceptual possibility
- Seoul and after: from possibility to feasibility

Summary: Why this initiative?

- Information feeding peer pressure and public accountability has become more powerful than legislation and regulation...
 - ... and makes international comparisons inevitable in a field that has hitherto been primarily of national interest
- The cost of action is significant...
 - Major challenges need to be overcome to assess HE outcomes
- ... but so is the cost of inaction
 - Without such data, judgements about higher education outcomes will continue to be made on the basis of idiosyncratic rankings derived from higher education inputs

Summary: Potential users and uses

– Stakeholders and information needs

- Individuals, whether prospective students or employers, may be interested in the “bottom line” of the performance of institutions, departments or faculties
- Individuals, institutions and policy makers wishing to assess the quality of services provided may be interested in the “value added” by the institutions

– The relevance of contextual data...

...to make the assessment an effective tool to reveal best practices, to identify shared problems and to encourage collaboration and capacity building among research and teaching personnel .

Summary: scope and purpose

- Our measures need to reflect central and enduring parts of higher education teaching that relate to quality of outcomes
- Challenge of getting the balance right between breadth and depth
 - Not everything that is important needs to be dealt with in detail but the complexity and diversity of higher education needs to be reflected
- Seek measures that are as comparable as possible...
 - ...but as specific for institutions as necessary
- Focus coverage as much as feasible...
 - ...but keep it as large as necessary to be useful for policy formation

Summary: from whom should we collect data?

- Comparative data at system level beyond the scope
 - Variation in institutional structures across countries
 - Nationally representative samples unrealistic – at least in the short term
 - Large cross-country differences in enrolment rates and system structure raise questions about interpretation of performance measures
- Focus on measures at the level of institutions, departments or faculties
 - Combining the definition of OECD measures of quality with reliable assessment methods to which institutions could voluntarily subscribe...
 - ...and which might progressively find wider acceptance .

Summary: What might we be trying to assess?

- Cover both discipline-related competencies ...
 - Strengths
 - Easily interpretable in the context of departments and faculties
 - Challenges
 - Requires highly differentiated instruments
 - Excludes competency areas that are not amenable to large-scale assessment or not sufficiently invariant across cultures and languages
 - Menu: (Electronic) Engineering, Biotechnology, Economics
- ... as well as transversal higher-order competencies manifested or required in disciplinary contexts
 - Strengths
 - Less dependent on occupational and cultural contexts, applicable across HEIs, departments and faculties
 - Powerful driver for improving the quality of teaching in the disciplines
 - Challenges
 - Reflect cumulative learning outcomes, need to be related to prior learning
 - Does not relate to the kind of subject-matter competencies that many HEIs, departments or faculties would consider their province .

Summary: Some practical considerations

- Collect data near, but before, the end of the first degree (large testing window)
- Successful institutional participation contingent on meeting international standards for test administration and student participation rates
- Computer delivered assessments
 - Possibly web-based
- Describe performance through proficiency levels
 - Can do statements
- What feedback to institutions?
 - performance profiles and contextual data
 - their own results and those of other institutions (anonymously?)
- What feedback to students?
 - how to motivate them?

Summary: A feasibility study

- ...to assess whether reliable cross-national comparisons of higher education learning outcomes are scientifically possible and whether their implementation is feasible
 - OECD to establish broad frameworks that guide international expert committees charged with instrument development in the assessment areas
 - Several choices for the feasibility study
 - choose from existing instruments (respecting their integrity)
 - choose from existing item pools (combining pieces of existing instruments in ways that cover frameworks)
 - develop new assessment material
 - Implementation in 5 institutions in 3-6 countries across multiple languages
- Countries to determine further steps on the basis of the outcomes

Informal Ministerial meeting, Tokyo, January 2008

- No formal decisions
- Engaged discussion about the issues
- Support for OECD approach provided it takes account of institutional diversity
- Chair's summary available

Next steps

- Appointment of a project manager
 - Applications close 17 February
- Securing funding
- Development of the instrument
- Design of a feasibility study
 - Proof of concept AND practicality
- Communication and discussion with stakeholders:
university groups (eg European University Association),
faculty, business, and student organisations

Other related work

- This is only a part of the picture:
 - OECD indicators – Education at a Glance
 - Thematic review of tertiary education policy
 - Lisbon 3-4 April
 - IMHE work on the impact of rankings and institutional strategy
 - ‘Does size matter? Reykjavik, 5-6 June (in cooperation with University of Iceland and NUS)
 - Higher education and regional development
 - Globally competitive, locally engaged
 - University futures (CERI)
 - IMHE General Conference
 - Outcomes of higher education: quality, relevance and impact, Paris 8-10 September

Thank you

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