



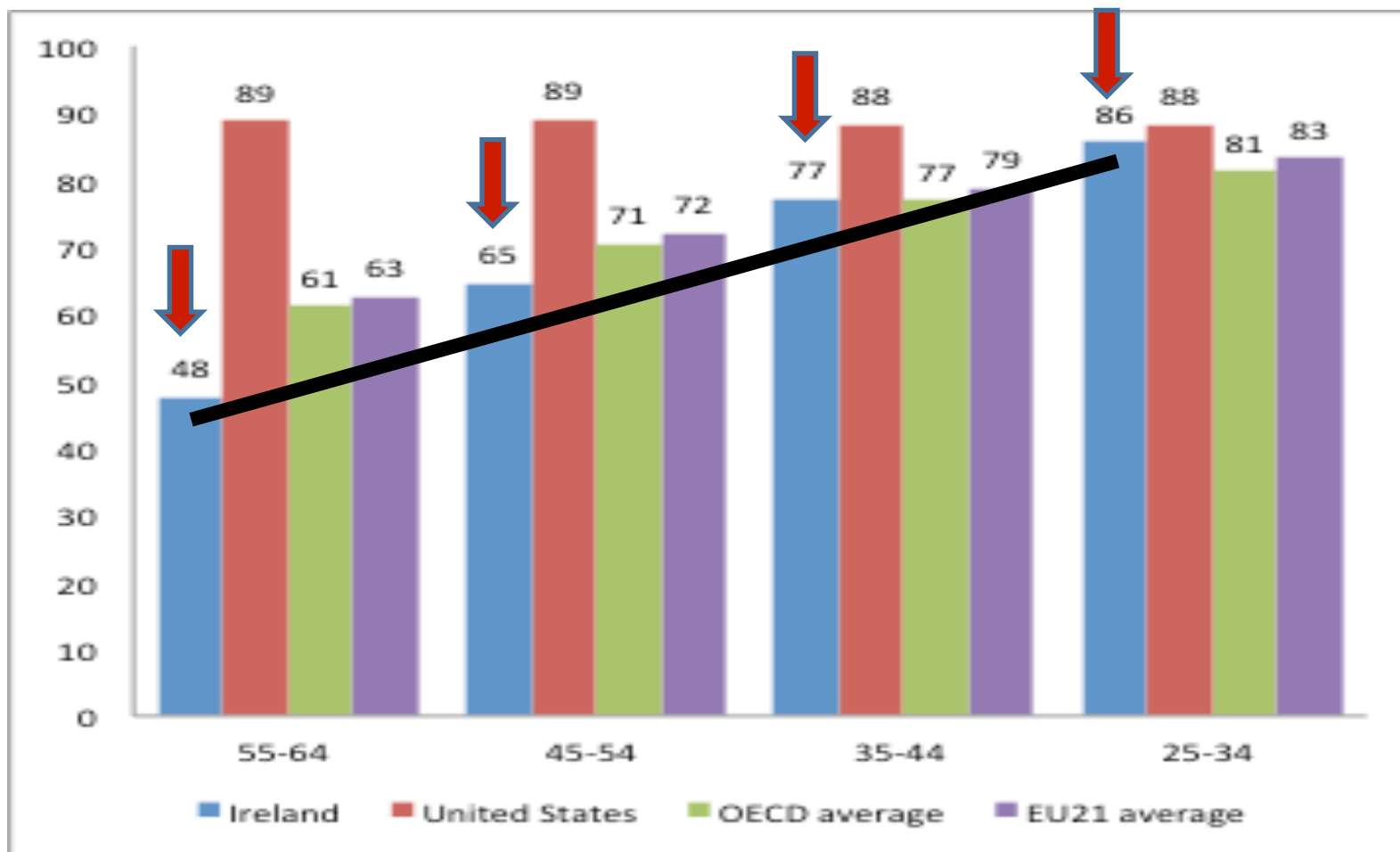
Preparation for and Participation in Higher Education in Ireland

Penn GSE Executive Doctorate in Higher Education Management

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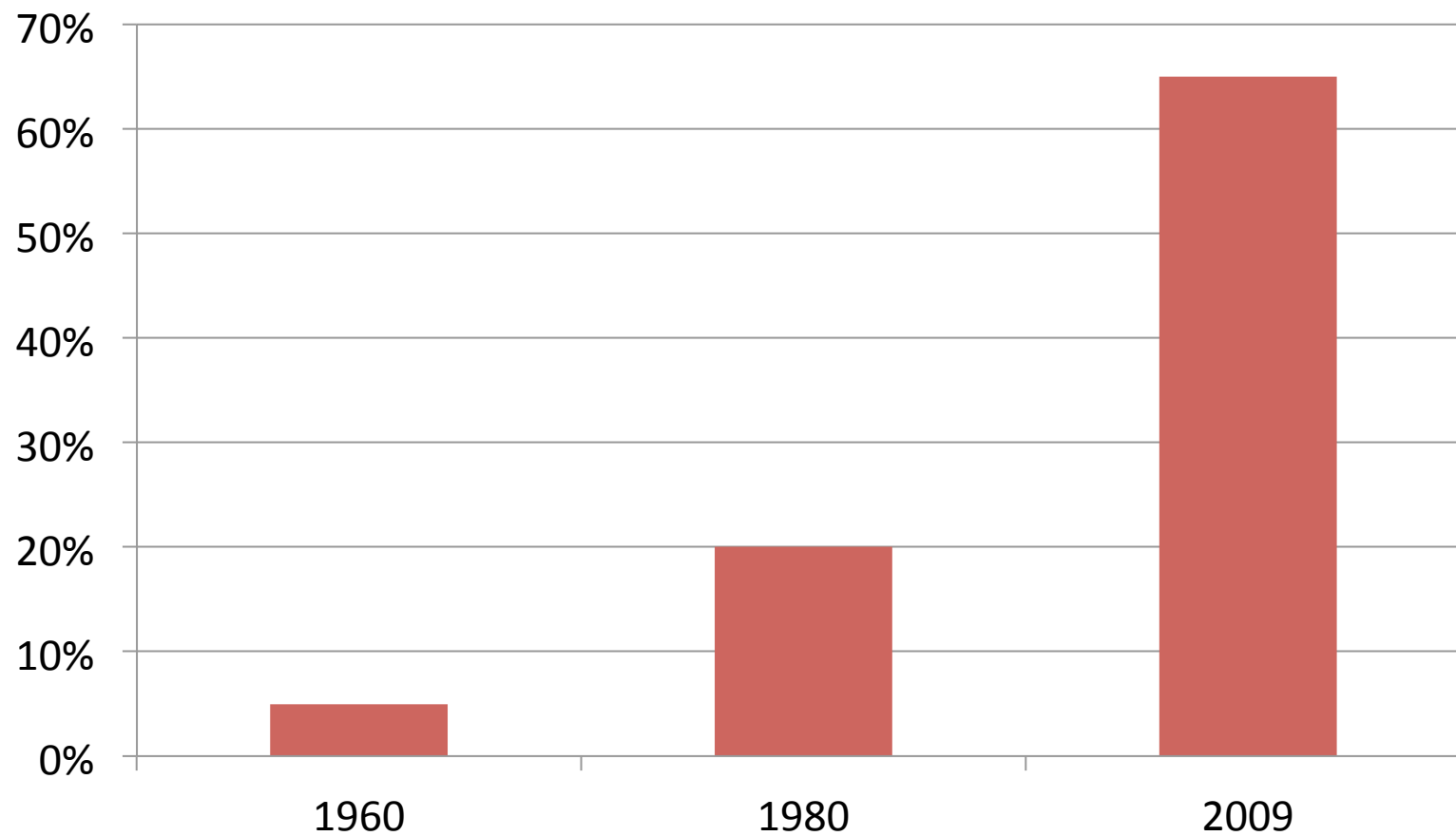
Ireland has made dramatic improvements in the percentage of second level graduates



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a glance 2011: OECD indicators*. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2011-en>



Full time new entrants (18 yr olds) participating in Irish higher education has grown over the last 50 years

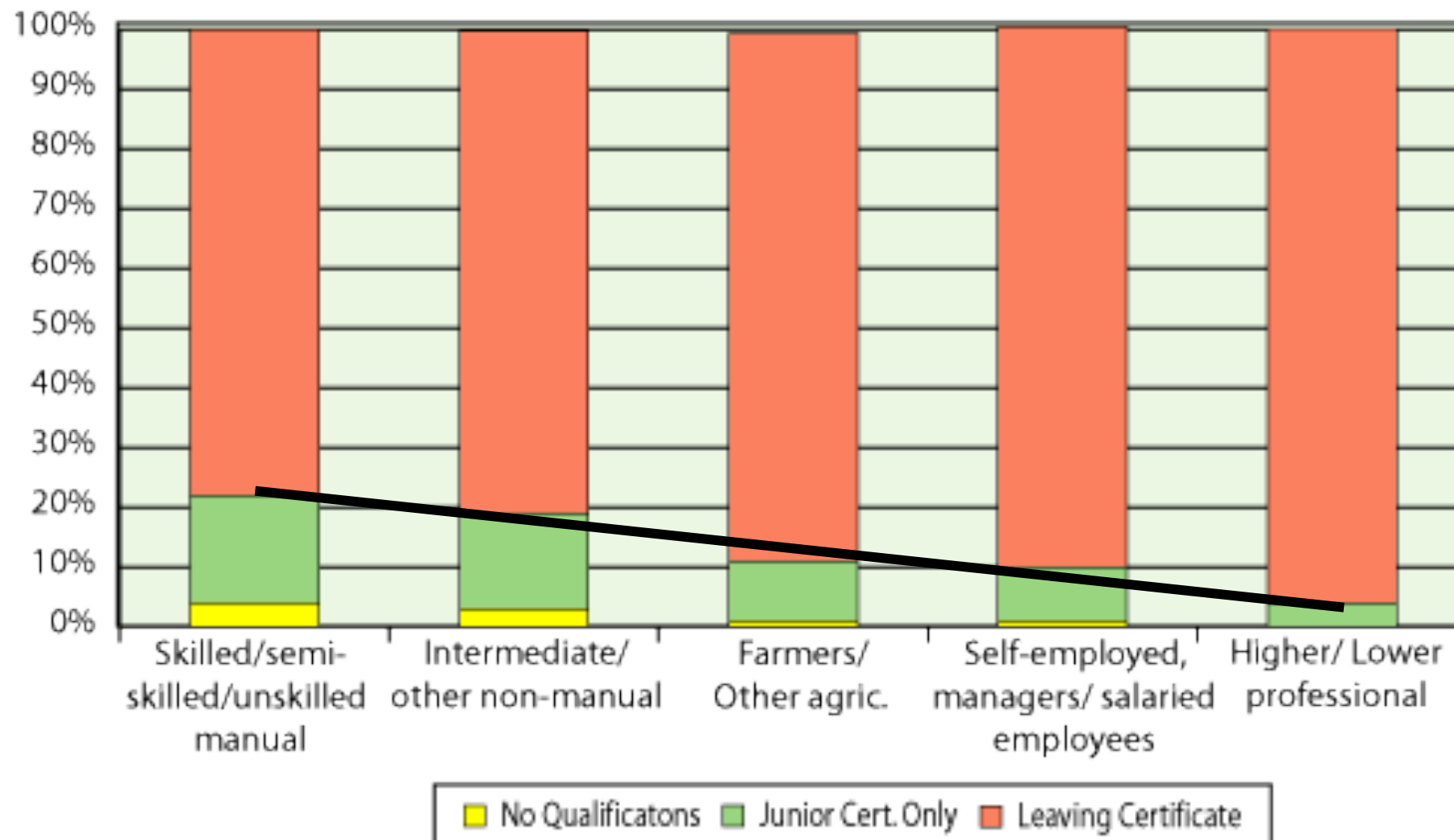


Source: The Strategy Group (2011, January), *National strategy for higher education to 2030*. p. 31.



Preparation at second level varies by social class

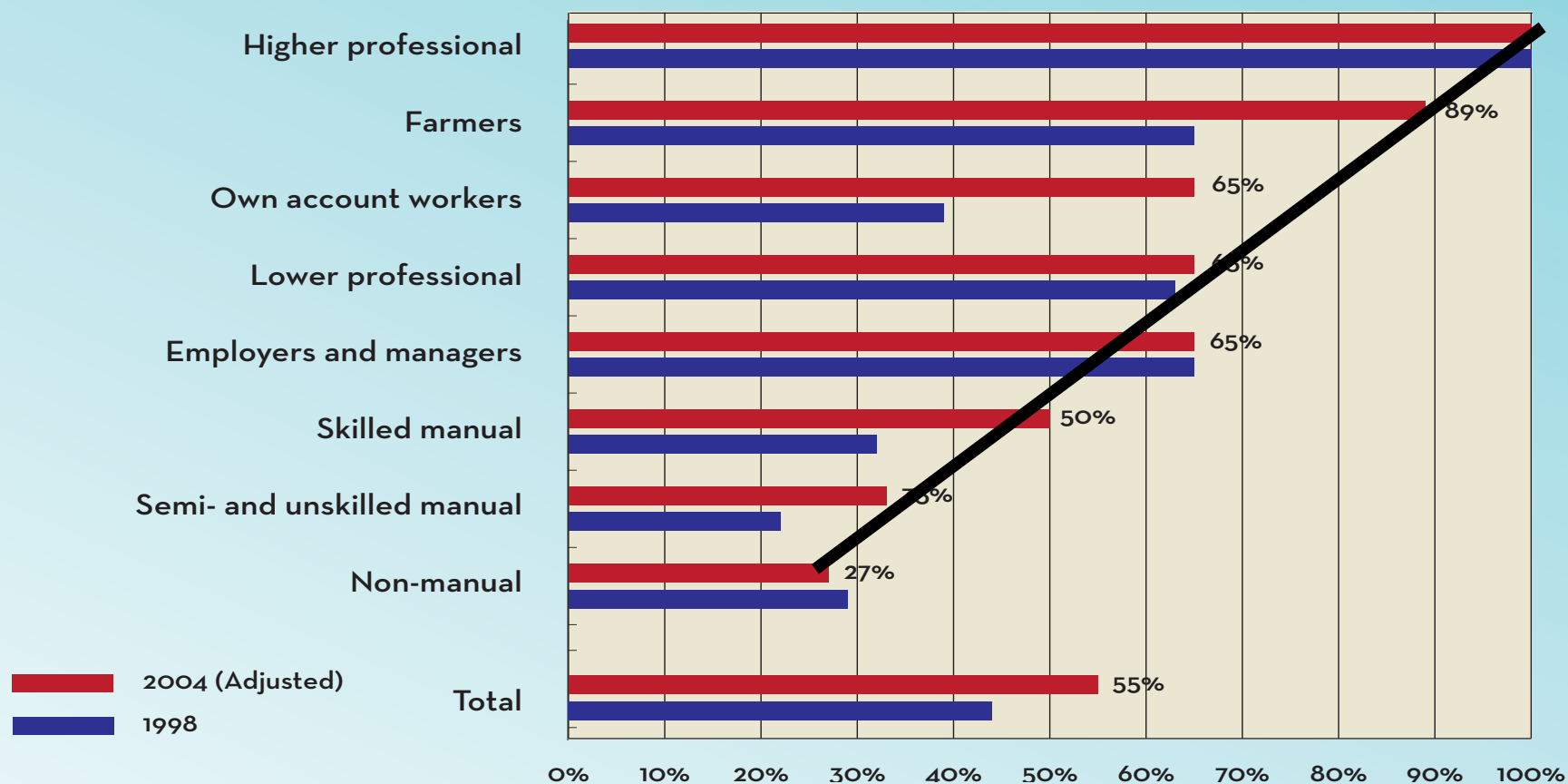
School Leavers in Ireland by level of educational attainment and SES background, 2001.





Entry of 18 yr olds to higher education also varies by social class

Figure 2.1 Entry rates to higher education by socio-economic group, 1998 & 2004



Source: National Office of Equity of Access, Higher Education Authority. (2008). National plan for equity of access to higher education 2008-2013. Retrieved from [http://www.heai.ie/files/files/file/National_Access_Plan_2008-2013_\(English\).pdf](http://www.heai.ie/files/files/file/National_Access_Plan_2008-2013_(English).pdf)



Ireland has a strong cultural tradition and commitment to higher education

- “We believe very strongly that higher education is central to future economic development in Ireland.” – National Strategy 2011
- “Ireland is the most educated country in the world.” – HEA Official
- “Education is very important in Ireland but it does not apply to me.” – Dublin Taxi Driver
- “Education is the single most important investment block for Ireland’s future prosperity.” – Business Official
- “Education is a cultural priority. It is the way to improve ourselves.” – University Administrator
- “There are broad social and cultural advantages to widening participation in higher education.” – National Strategy 2011



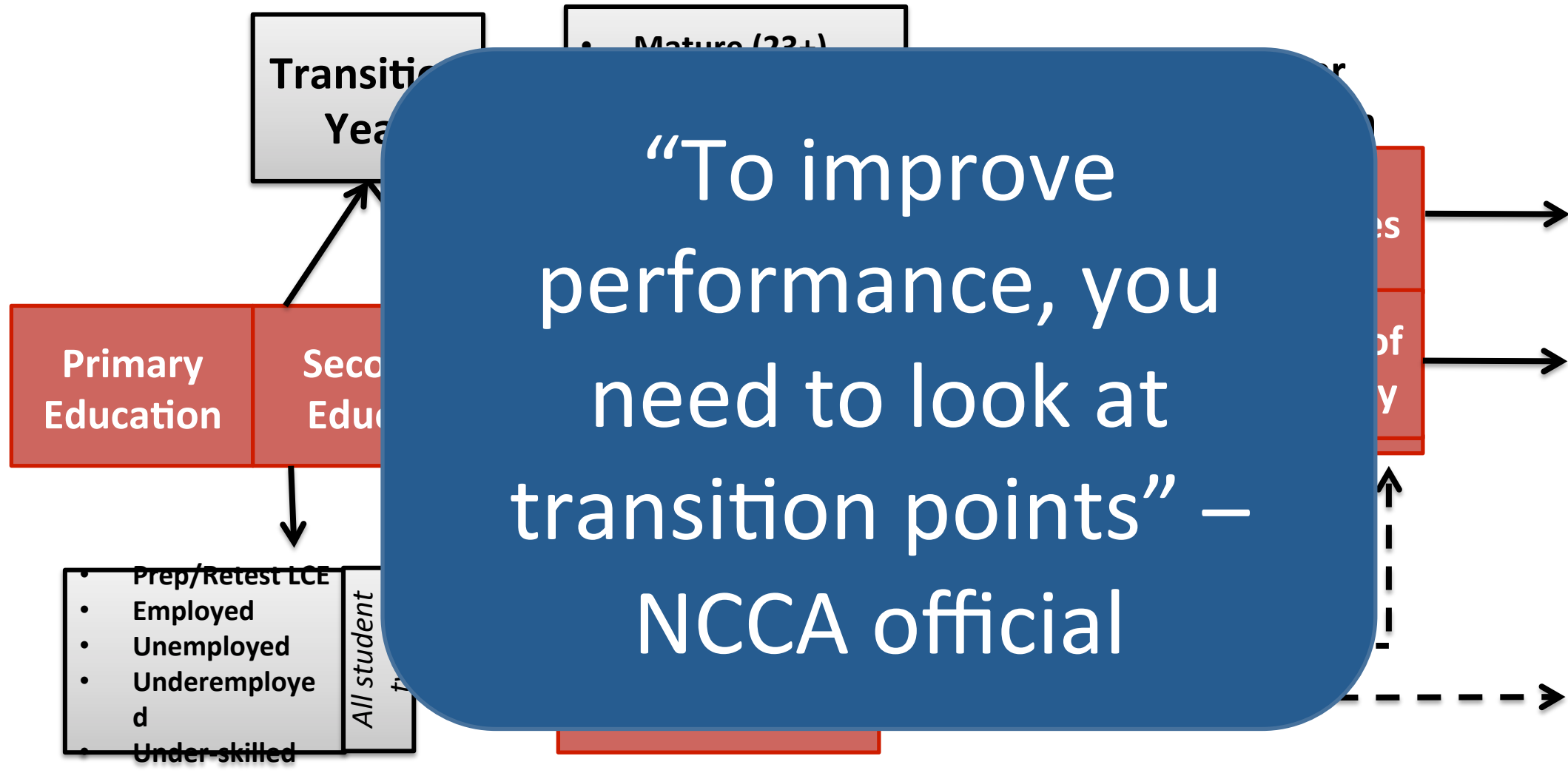
Higher education policy has contributed to growth of participation rates in Ireland

- Free second-level education (1967)
- Free higher education (1996)
- Increased regional access/expanded capacity of IoTs
- Growth in the number of courses
- Social welfare exceptions



Creating flexible access routes to higher education is central to the national strategy for higher education

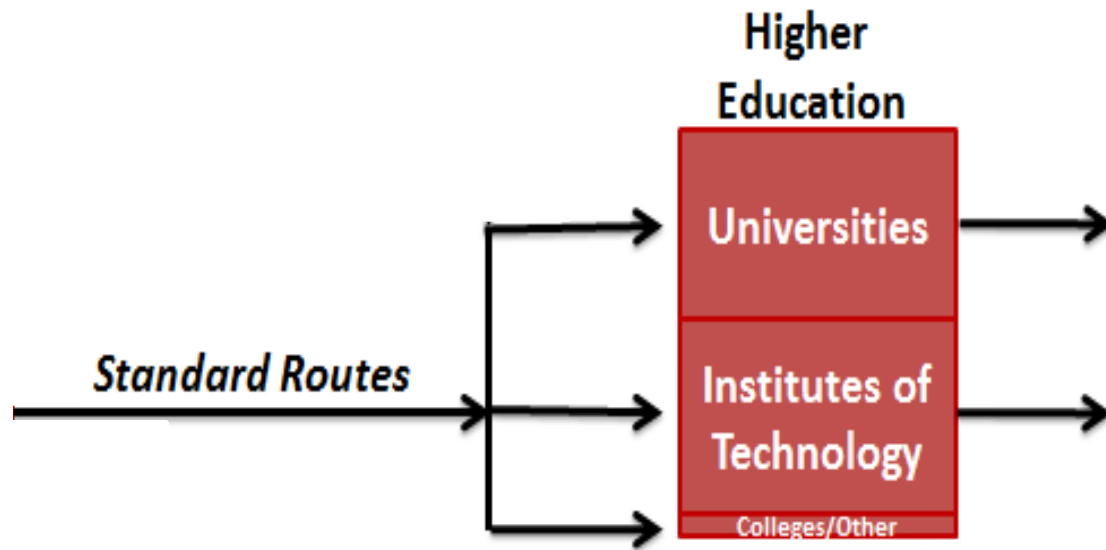
“To improve performance, you need to look at transition points” – NCCA official



The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030: “To create and enhance human capital by expanding participation in higher education...[which] demands that Ireland’s higher education system become much more flexible...and facilitates transfer and progression through all levels of the system” (p. 10-11).



The standard route to higher education is defined by a single entrance exam



“The LCE is firm but fair, harsh but transparent.” – CAO Official

“Public is expecting predictability on the test yet there is outcry on rote learning.”
– CAO official

KEY ELEMENTS

- Curriculum-based entry exam (49 subjects)
- Points system (top 6 subjects)
- Centralized admission system (CAO)

STRENGTHS

- “Predictive”, “streamlined”, “fair”, “transparent”, and “legitimized”

CHALLENGES

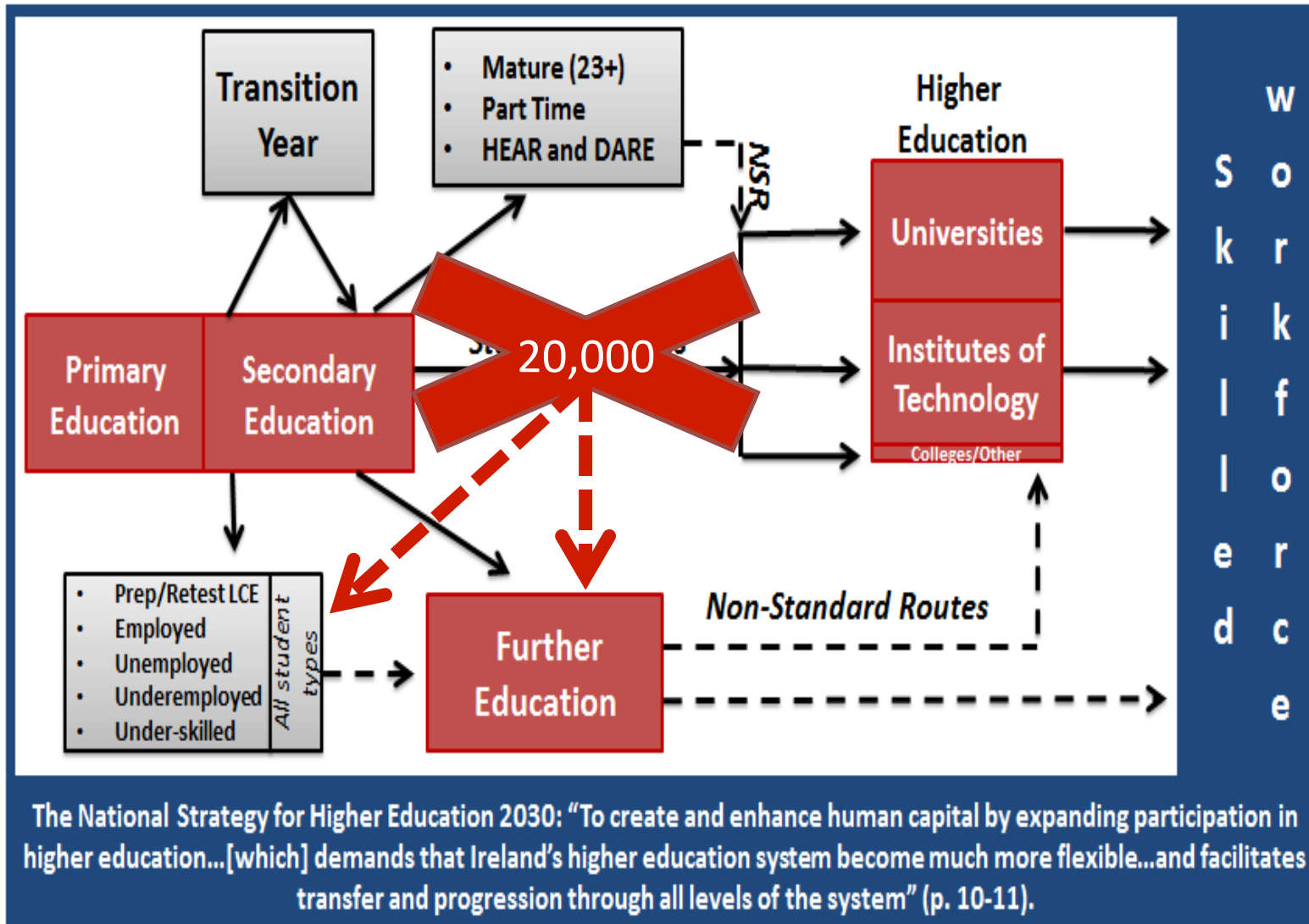
- “High stakes” and a “one stop shop”
- Impacts on senior cycle:
 - Early choice of courses of study
 - Narrowing of the curriculum
 - Test-results driven, teaching to test
 - Math and literacy deficiencies
 - Career advising concerns

- Designed for traditional aged students



Capacity challenges exist in the higher education system

In 2011 CAO received*:



- **61,468** first preference applications to level 8 courses. Total acceptances were **32,372**.
- **28,341** students accepted offers for level 8; **8,040** for level 7; and **3,156** for level 6.
- **20,000 (est.)** students who didn’t have a slot in higher education institutions went directly to the workforce or enrolled in further education institutions.

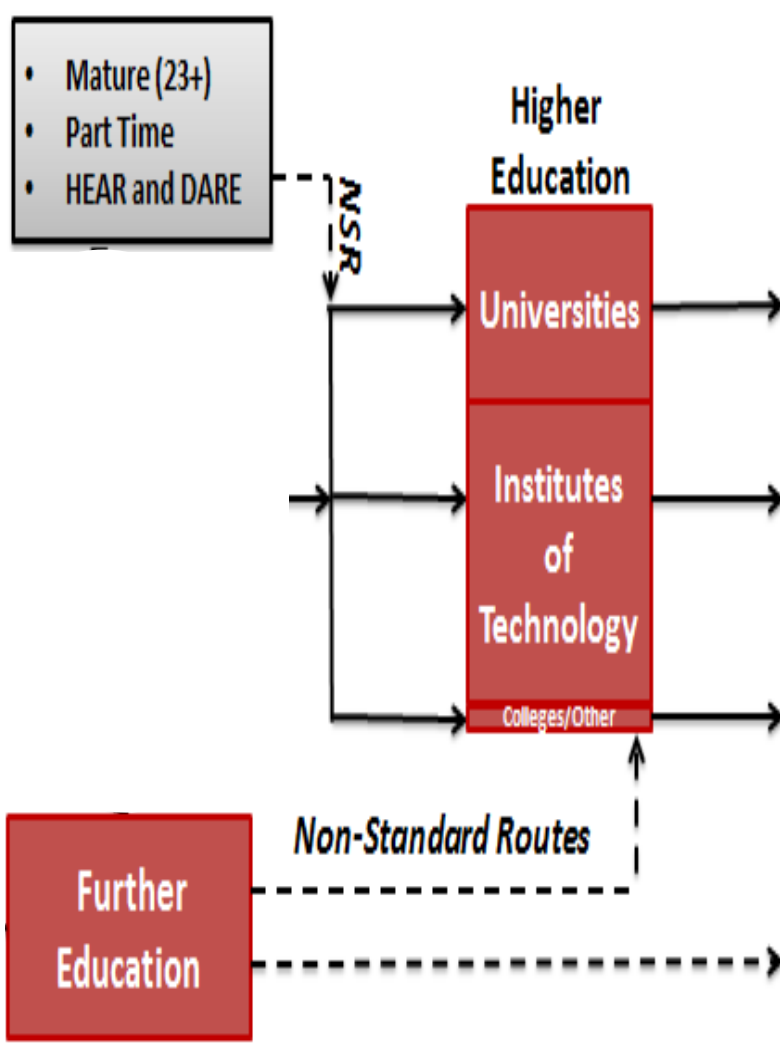
“We can’t keep pumping people out.” – IoT Official

* Source: HEA (2012), 10/11 higher education key facts and figures.

Retrieved from <http://www.heai.ie/files/HEA%20Key%20Facts%20%26%20Figures%2010.11%20Final.pdf>



There are specific challenges with non-traditional students who progress through non-standard routes

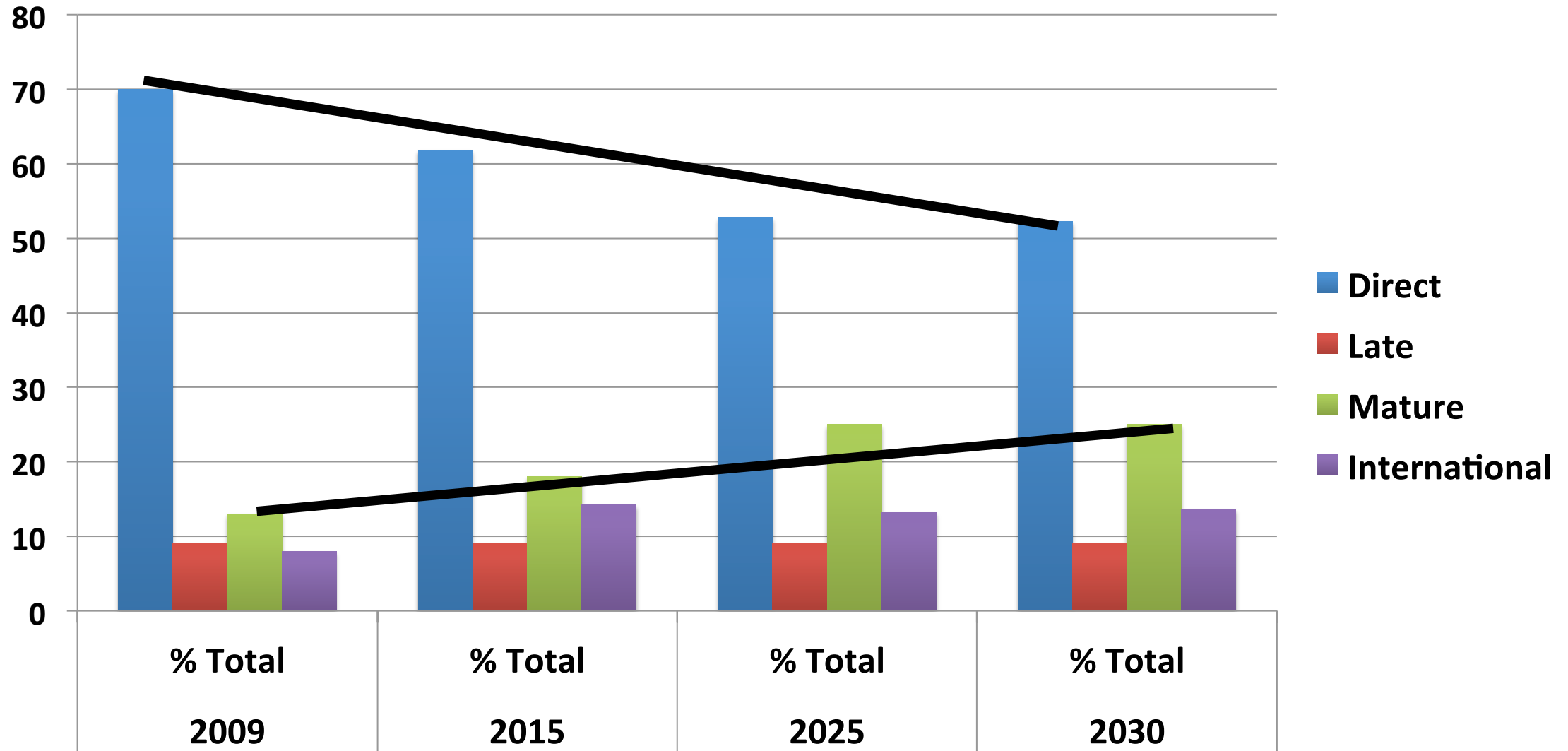


	Strengths	Challenges
HEAR & DARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy in place Universities have their own programs for recruiting disadvantaged students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity issue (HEAR) Challenges with access to and administration of program
Mature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation increase Aggressive national goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not funded (students pay full price) Increased unemployment creates demand Preparation
Part Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation Increase More routes to access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not funded (students pay full price) Lack of the necessary flexibility in courses Not funded Routes are not clear

“Part time flexible education is a major portion of the national strategy but all funds are allocated to full time students.” – National Access Office Official

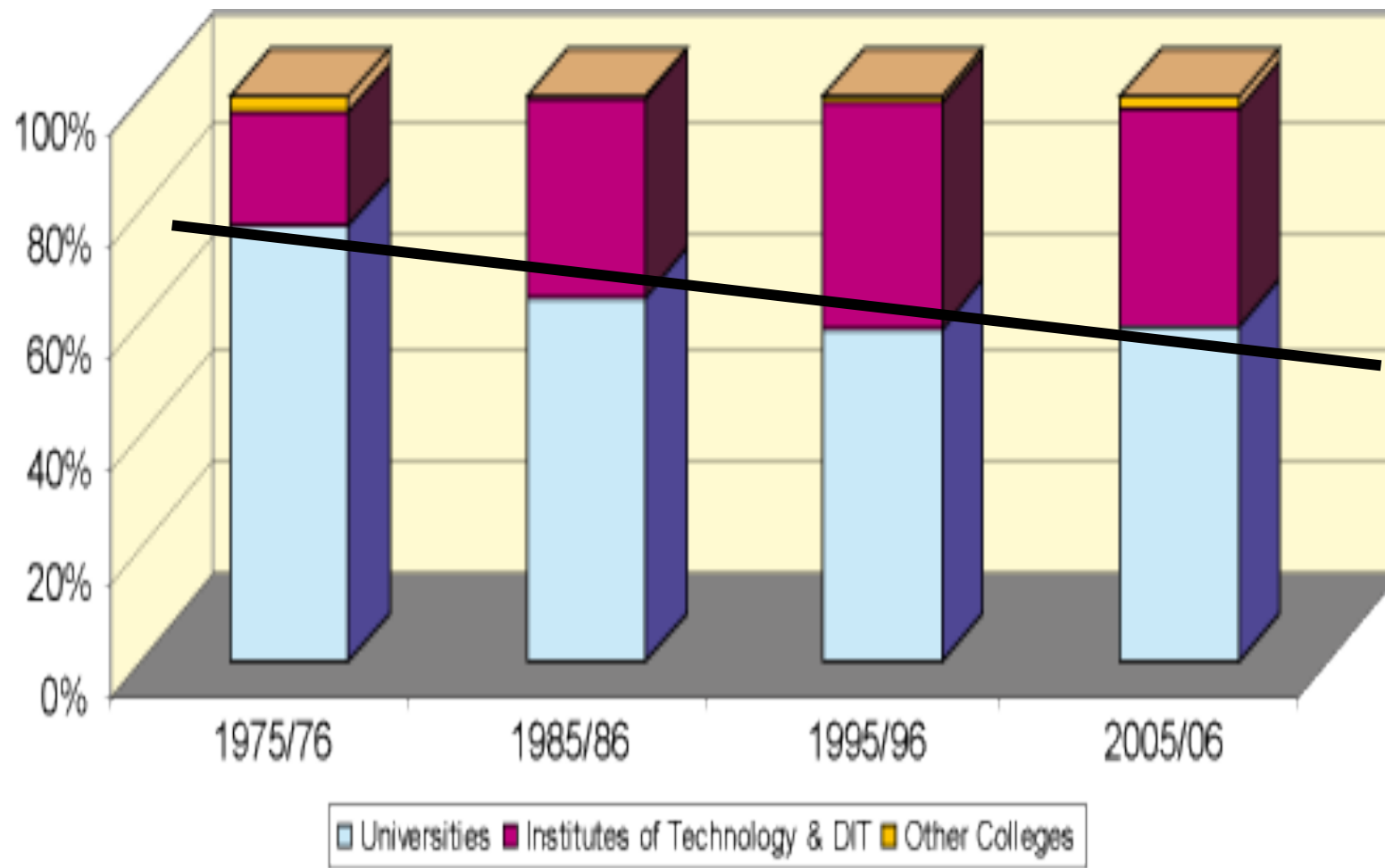


Challenges in the non-standard routes exist when projected increase in demand is highest among non-traditional students



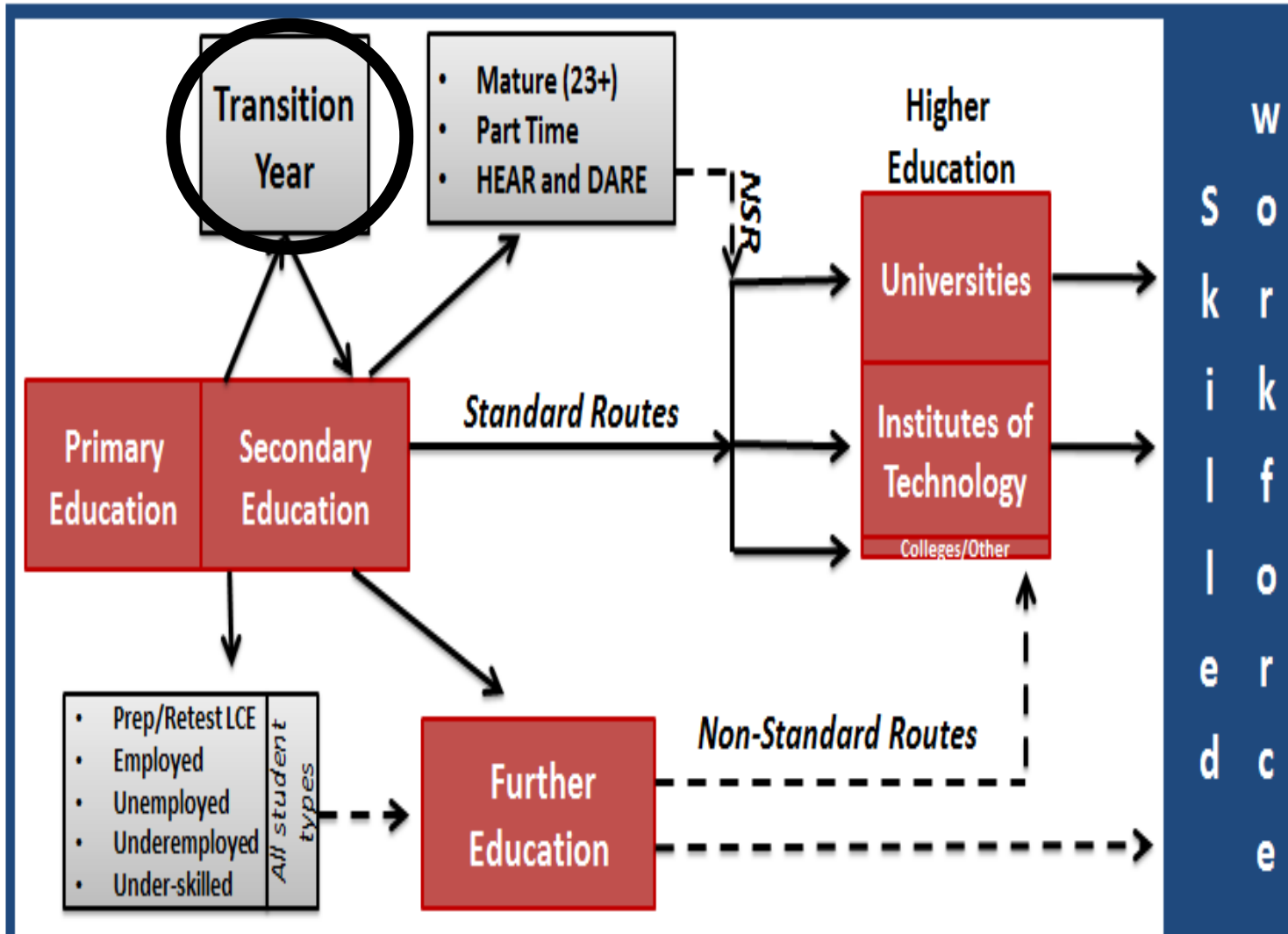


And when an increasing share of students are accessing higher education through the IoTs





The transition year is an opportunity to strengthen preparation prior to accessing higher education



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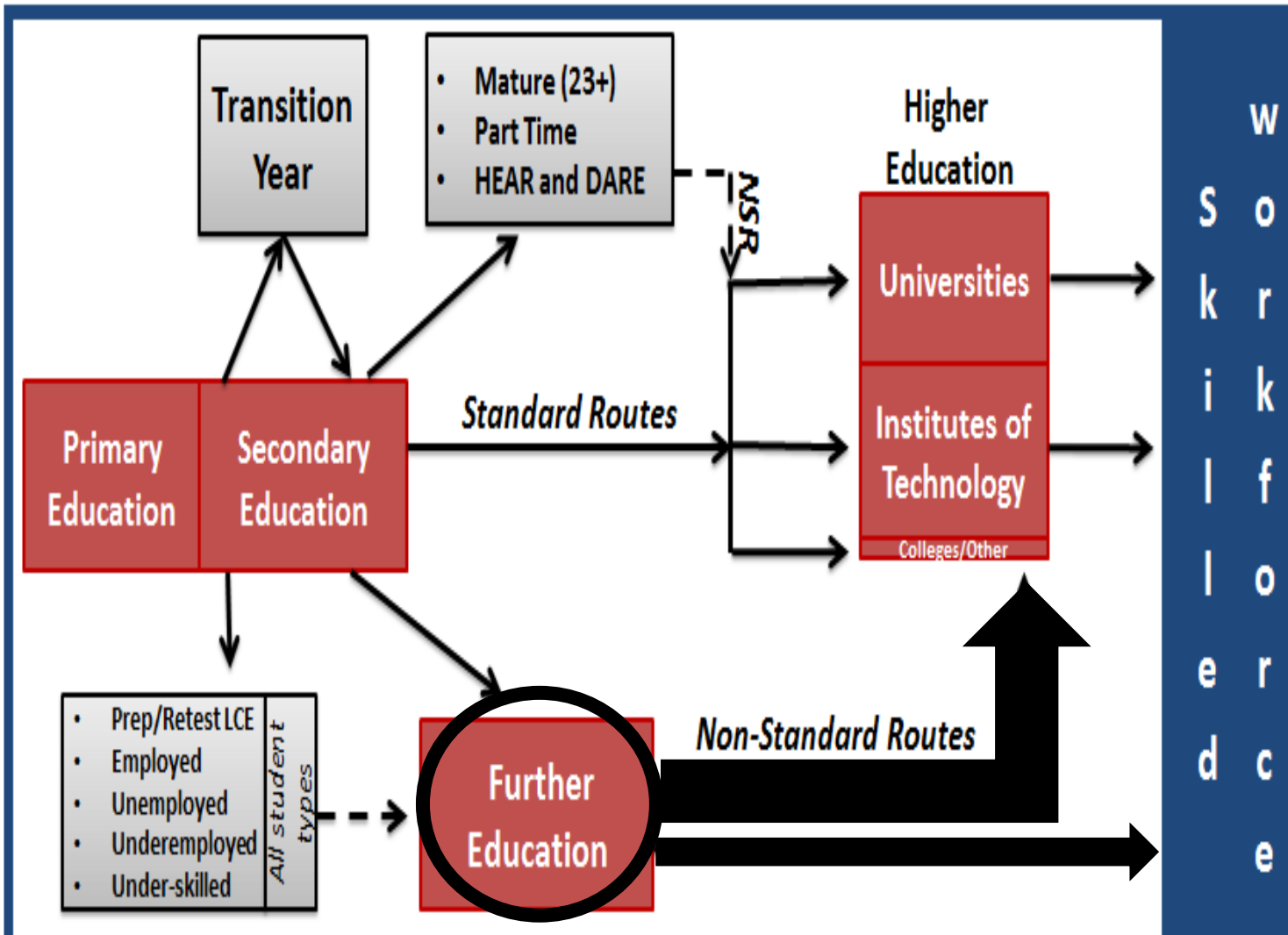
“Students who use transition year have a lot better idea of what their skills and interests are by the time they get here.” – Higher Education Leader

“The transition year is more about picking the right course, it is not about preparation or skill building for third level.” – IoT Administrator

The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030: “To create and enhance human capital by expanding participation in higher education...[which] demands that Ireland’s higher education system become much more flexible...and facilitates transfer and progression through all levels of the system” (p. 10-11).



Further education is an opportunity to strengthen preparation for higher education and a more skilled workforce



“Further education is relatively underdeveloped--you need to connect second level to further education to 3rd level you can see improvement in that space.” – HEA Official

“Further education has been the ‘Cinderella’ of education in Ireland. It has developed despite policy not because of it.” —Business Official

The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030: “To create and enhance human capital by expanding participation in higher education...[which] demands that Ireland’s higher education system become much more flexible...and facilitates transfer and progression through all levels of the system” (p. 10-11).



Participation in higher education is limited by barriers in the routes

“There is a lack of coherence in the educational continuum” – **University Leader**

“Further education is really bad [because of the] very little cooperation between further education and higher education. The two sectors just don't talk to each other. It doesn't work and it is something that we want to see improved a lot.” —**Senior Higher Education Official**

“Under data protection, Ireland is not allowed to track student movement.” – **HEA Administrator**



Thank you