

# **Round and round or fully rounded?**

## **How can we improve youth transitions?**

Richard Sweet  
ACER Research Conference  
Brisbane  
August 2008

“Work is the curse of the drinking classes”

*George Bernard Shaw*

“Work is the grand cure of all the maladies and miseries that ever beset mankind”

*Thomas Carlyle, 1886*

“He who sees abstinence from work in work, and work in abstinence from work, ... he possesses union, and has accomplished the whole work”

*Bhagavad Gita, Book IV*

Preparing the whole person  
for life...

...involves preparing them for  
work

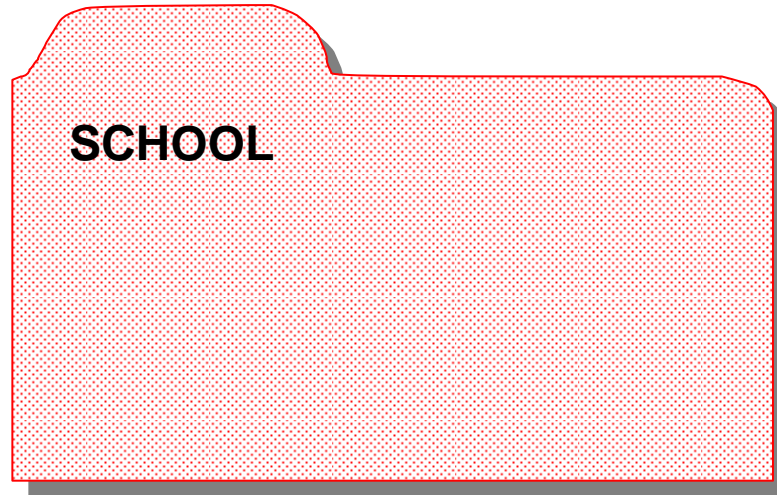
What does the research say  
about work?

# Lack of work is linked to

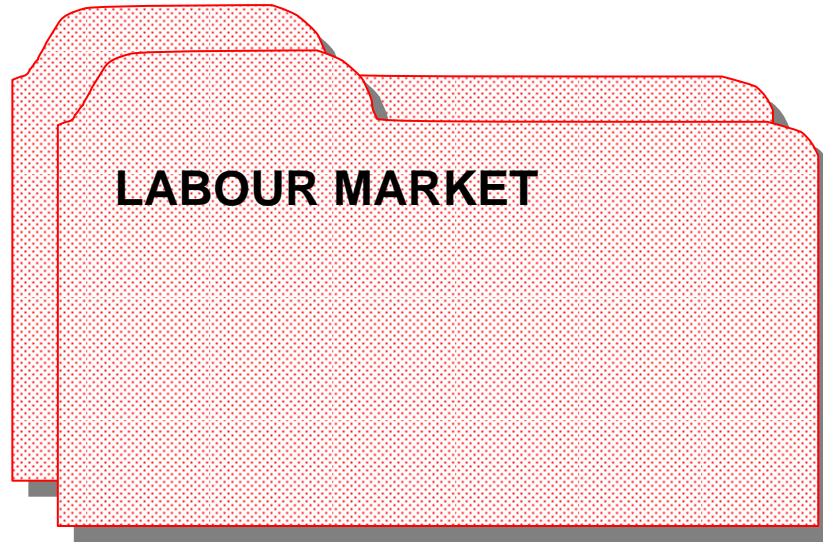
- Poor health
- Poverty
- Low civic engagement
- Low self esteem
- Unhappiness

**Bad work is better than no work**  
(Richard Layard)

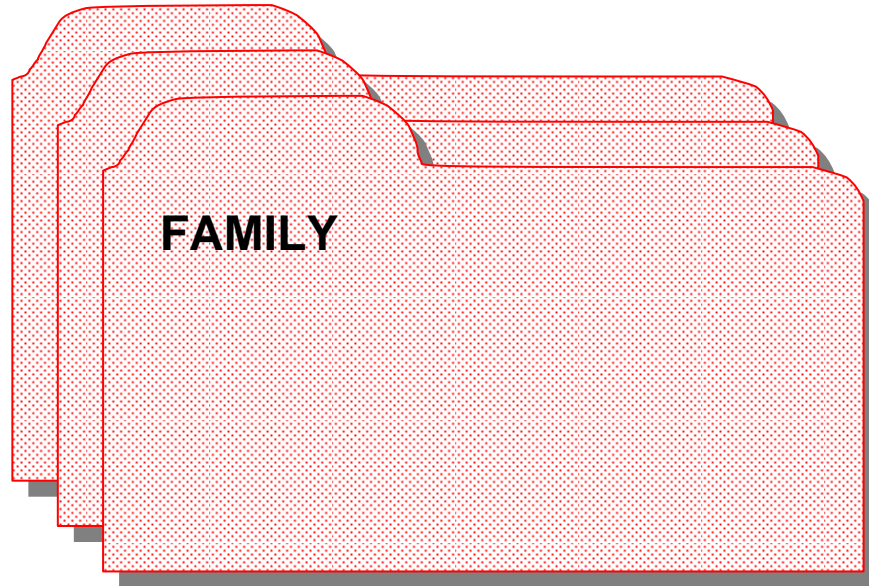
# Preparation for work



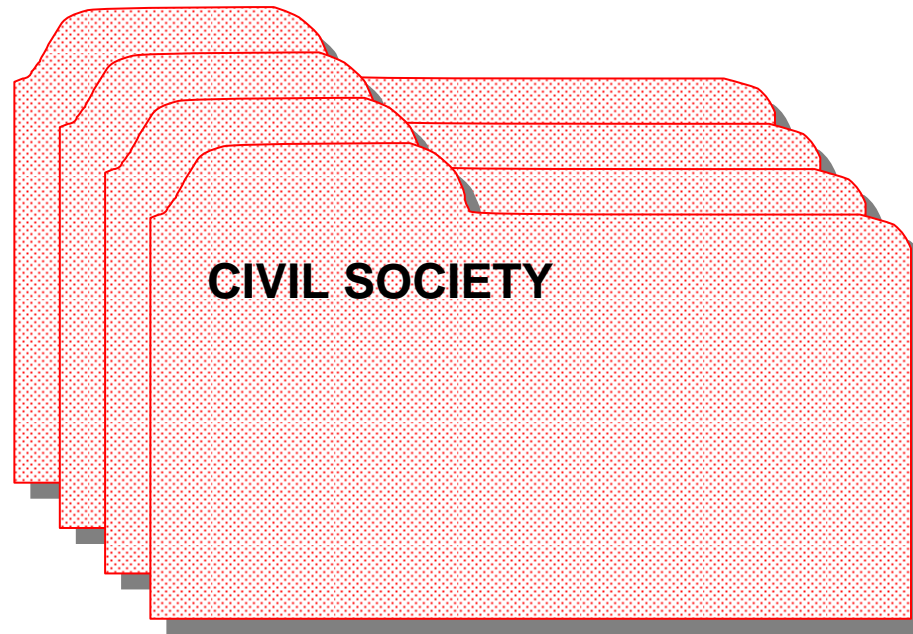
# Preparation for work



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# Preparation for work



Some young people make  
very successful transitions

# They...

- Have high academic skills
  - E.g. literacy, mathematics, science, problem solving
- Get good exam marks
- Complete high school
- Obtain vocational or professional qualifications
- Have good work skills
  - E.g. team work, initiative, oral communication, punctuality, persistence...
- Settle into a job quickly
- Earn a good salary
- Do not become unemployed
- Enjoy their work

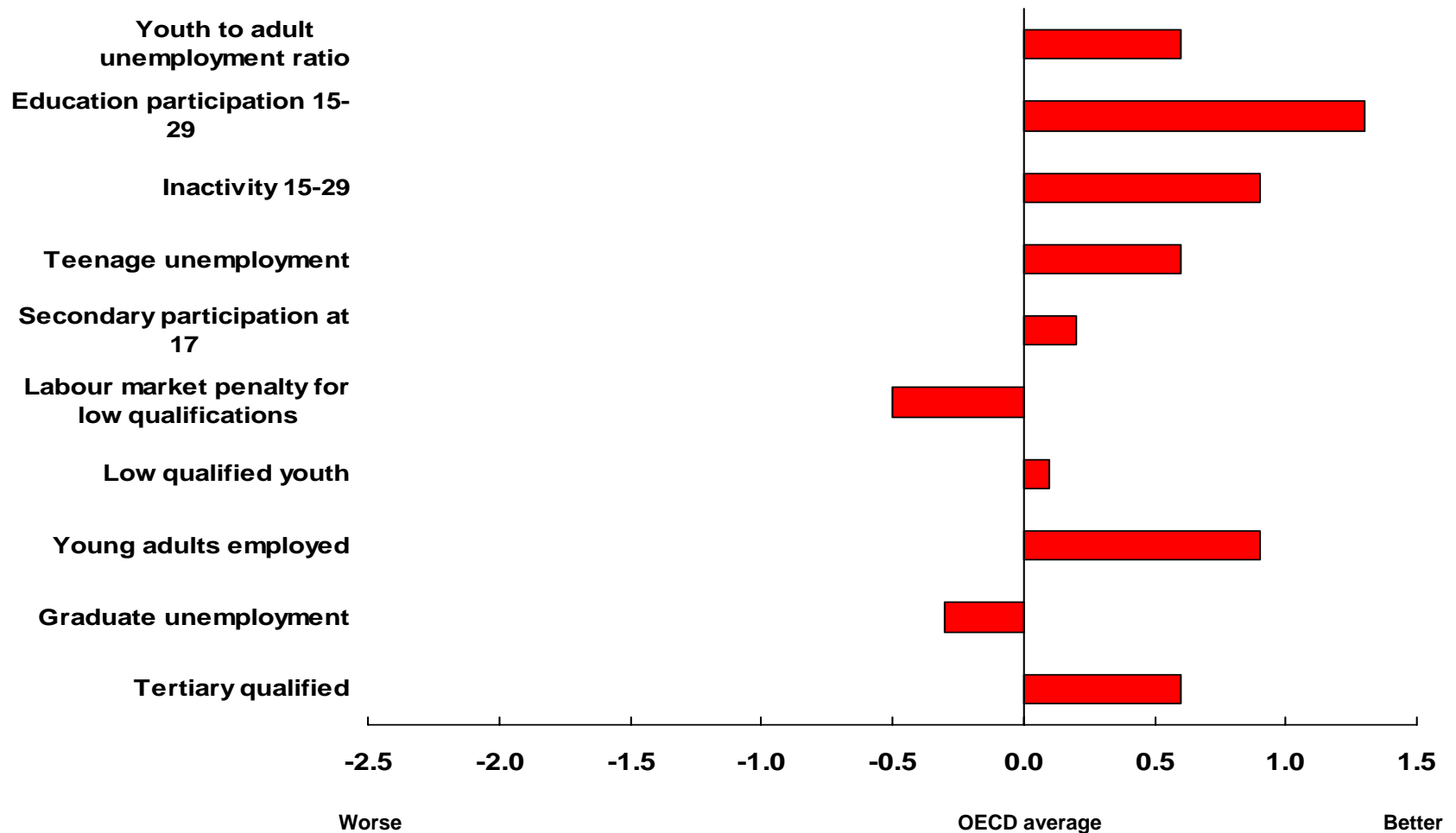
Others do not

# They...

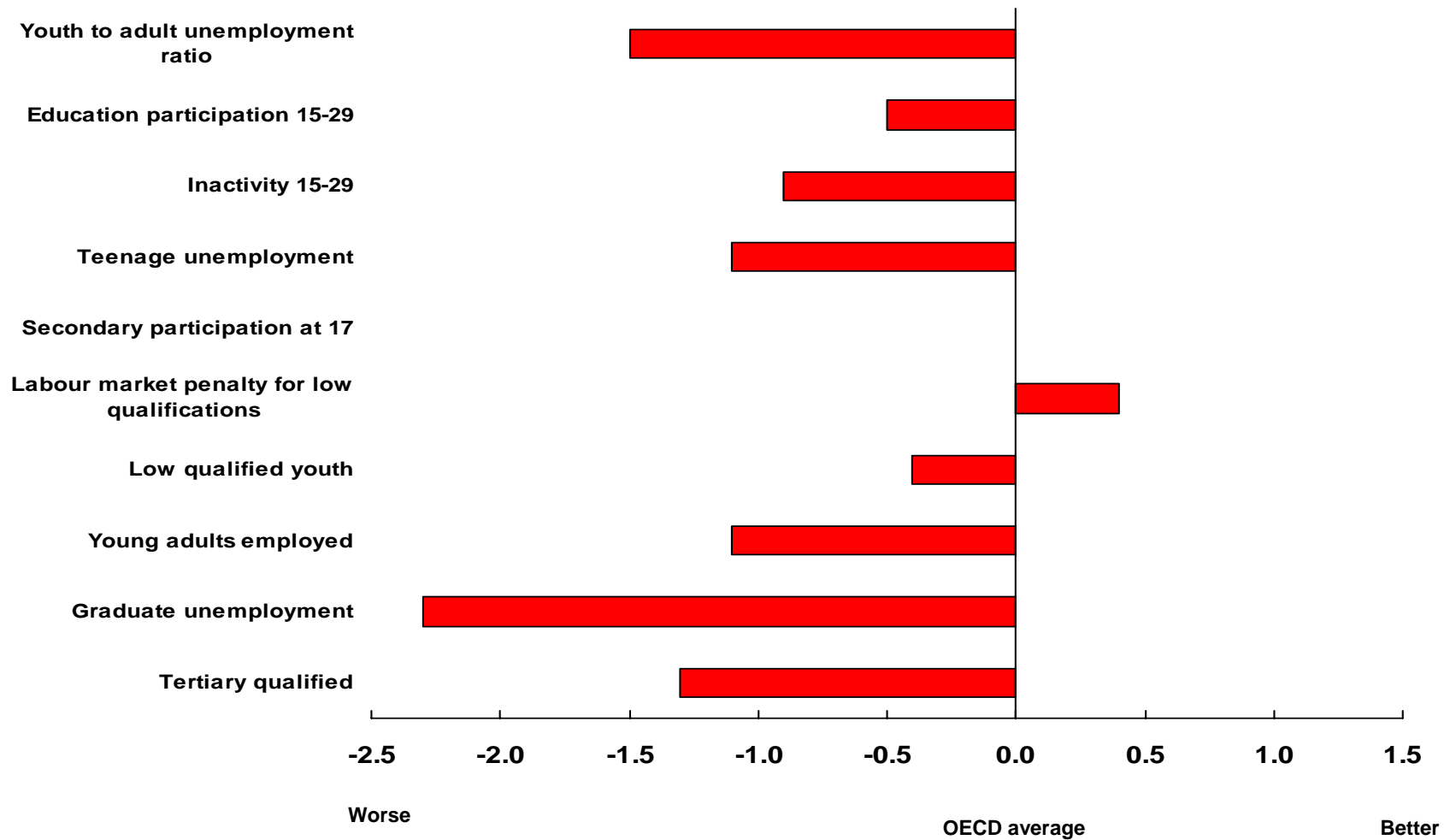
- Have poor academic skills
  - E.g. literacy, mathematics, science, problem solving
- Get low exam marks
- Drop out of school
- Obtain no vocational or professional qualifications
- Have poor work skills
- Take a long while to find work
- Earn very low wages
- Become unemployed
- Do not enjoy their work

Like young people, some  
*countries* have better  
transition outcomes than  
others

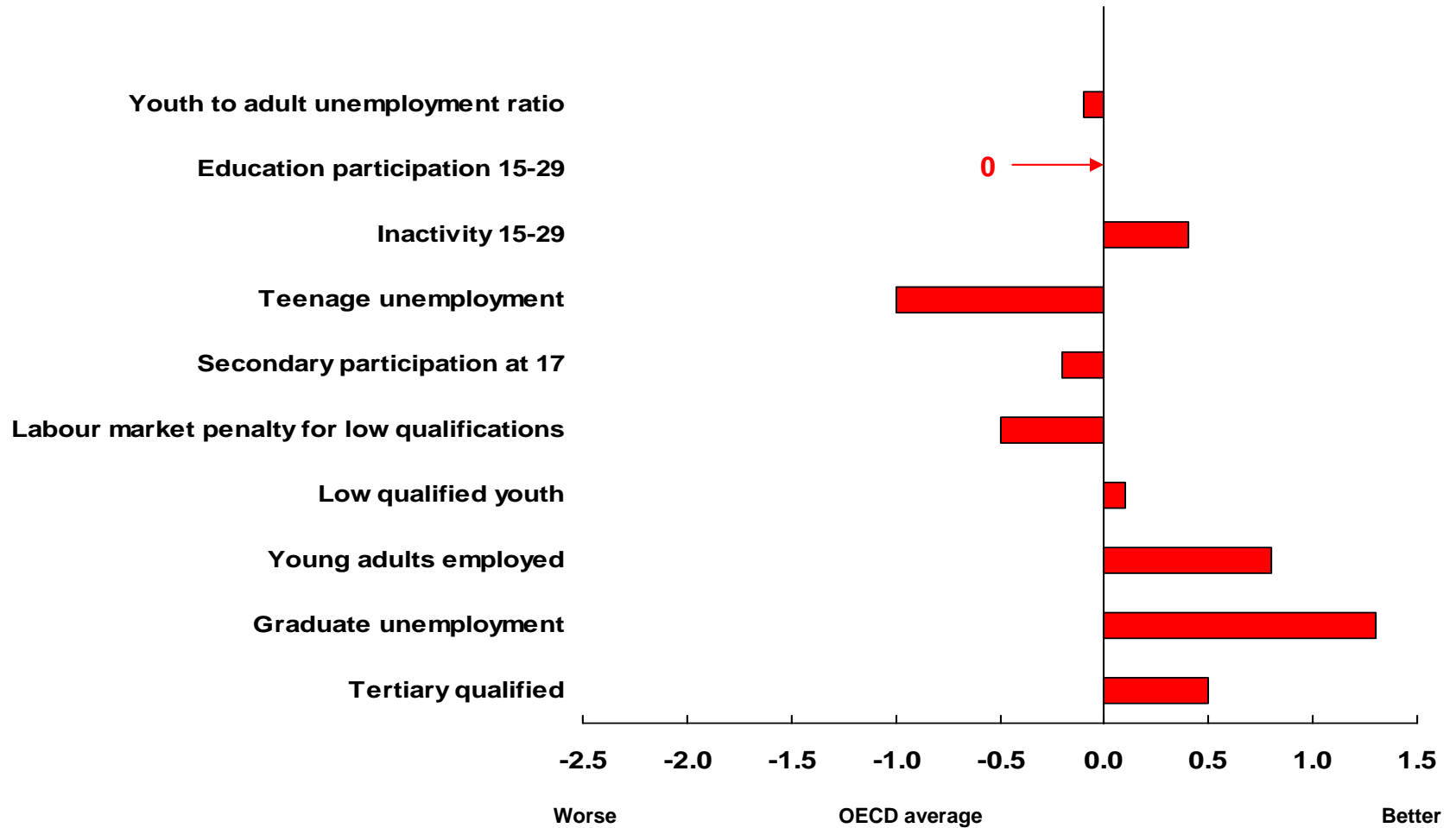
# Denmark gets most things right



# Italy gets very little right



# Australia is more of a mixed bag

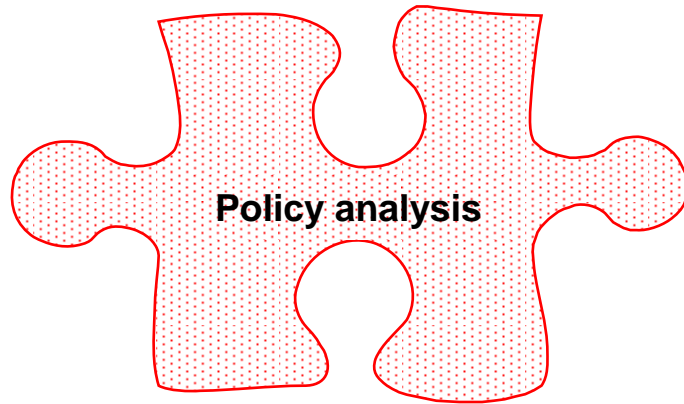


The top does well

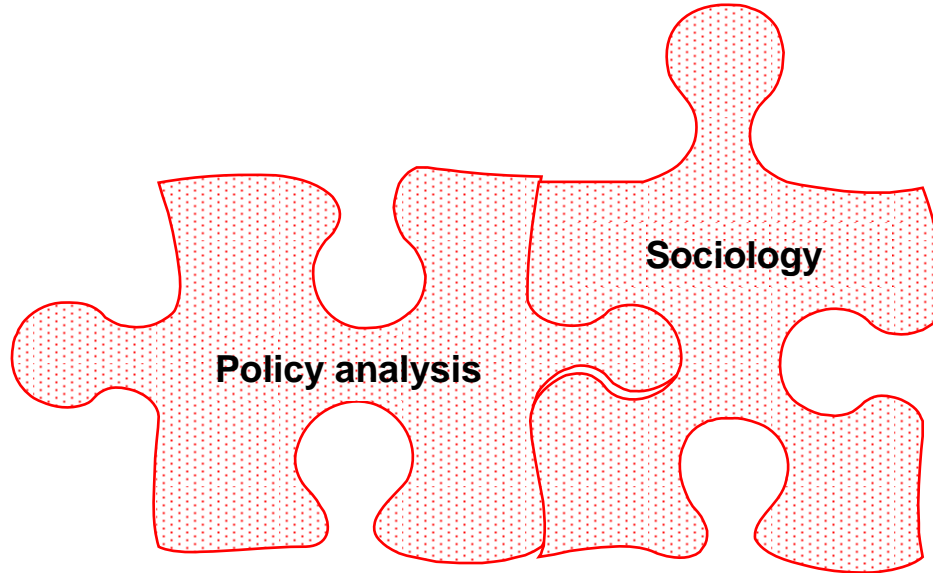
The weakest struggle

Why do some young people and  
some countries do better than  
others?

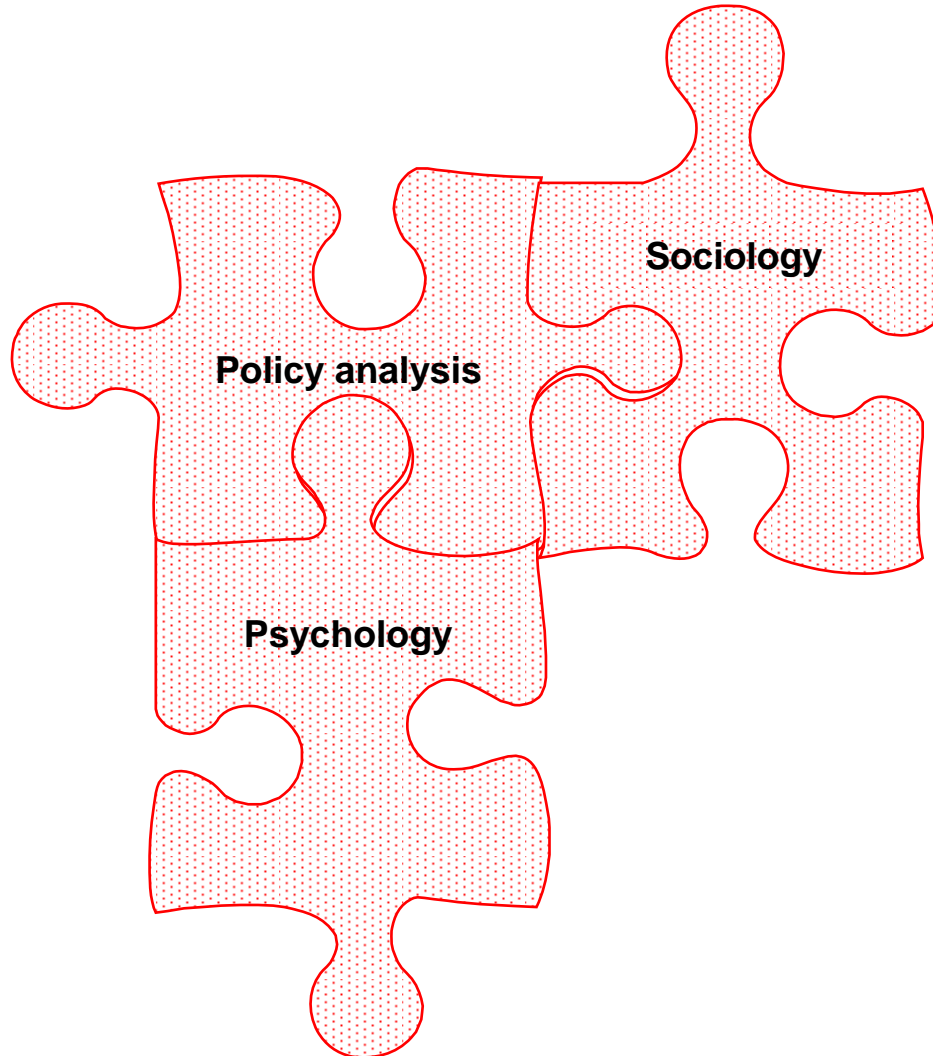
# The transition jigsaw – four research traditions



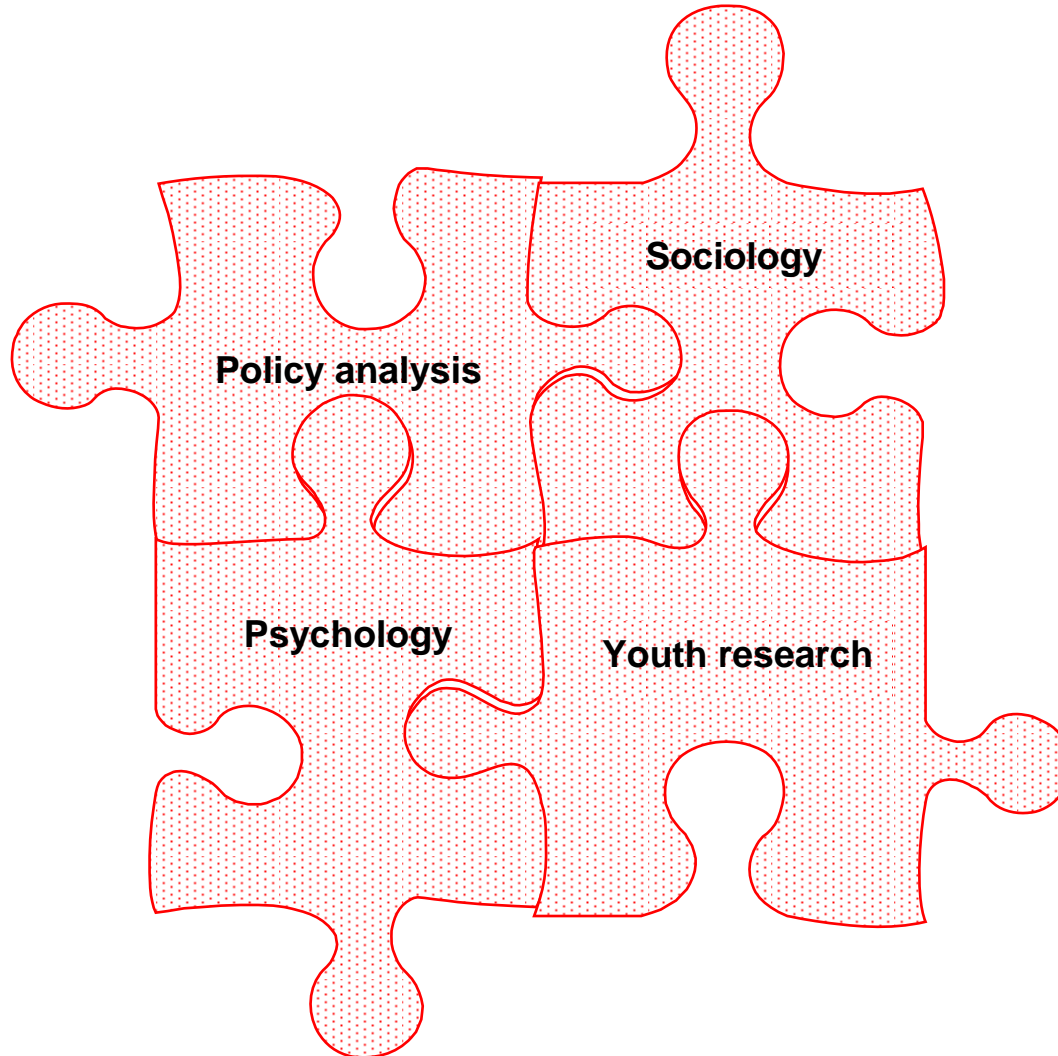
# The transition jigsaw – four research traditions

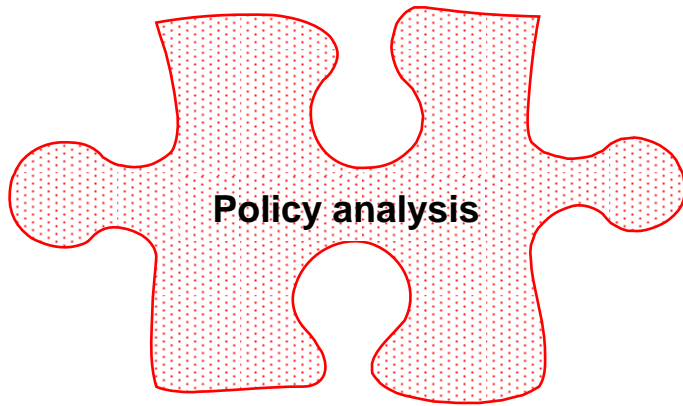


# The transition jigsaw – four research traditions



# The transition jigsaw – four research traditions





## **Structures, systems, institutions**

Education systems: Curriculum, pathways, qualifications

Labour markets: Wages, employment rates, regulation

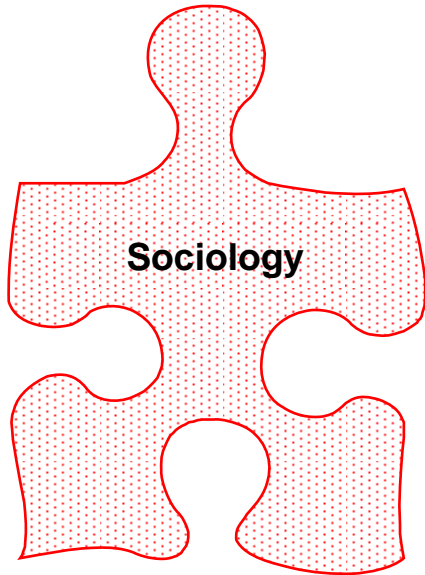
## **Programme evaluation**

Apprenticeship, labour market programmes

## **Key features of effective systems**

1. A healthy economy and labour market
2. Well organised pathways: Connecting qualifications to their destinations
3. Work plus study combinations: Apprenticeship, work placements, part-time jobs
4. Tight safety nets for those at risk
5. Good information and guidance
6. Effective institutions and processes: National and local

*(OECD, 2000)*



**Family background** e.g. economic and cultural resources

**Opportunity structures** e.g. geography, history

**Gender**

**Ethnicity**

**Key messages:**

**Gender matters (enduring and invariant)**

Although the extent varies among countries

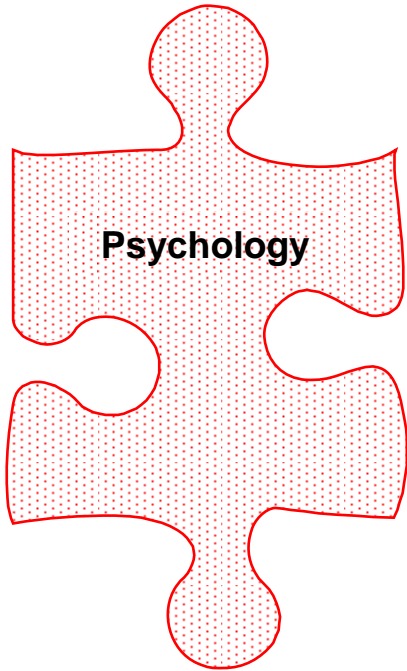
**So does socio-economic status**

But we know too little about national differences

**The impact of ethnicity remains unclear from comparative work**

**History (birth cohort) has an impact**

**Social capital (networks, partnerships) matters**



## **Educational achievement**

Literacy, numeracy

## **Personal characteristics**

Cognitive abilities, personality, personal competence

**Educational achievement is a powerful predictor and correlate of transition outcomes**

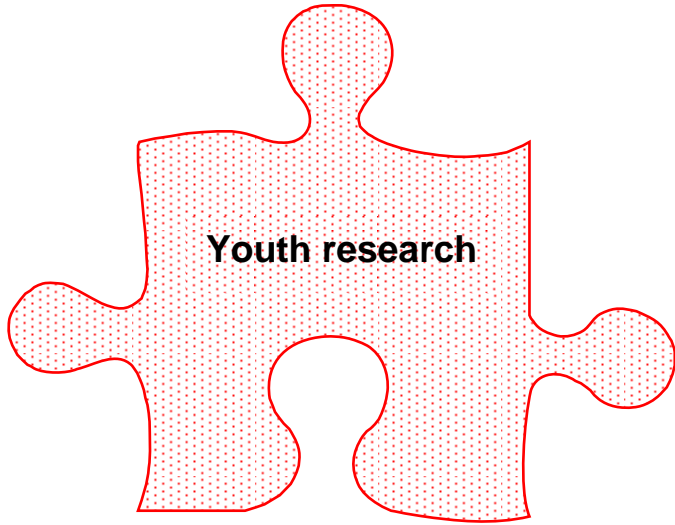
**Interests, aspirations and values have an impact upon outcomes**

**Personal competence is important**

Self-esteem, confidence, motivation

**Career self management skills are also important**

Planning, decision making, information seeking and use



**Structure**  
(Creating effective institutions)  
  
and  
  
**Agency**  
(Creating effective young people)

### **Structure and agency are interdependent**

- **Pathways change to accommodate young people's behaviour**
- **Aspirations, motivation and engagement seem to be significantly related to national institutions**
  - Nordic versus Mediterranean lifelong learning indicators
  - Differences in educational aspirations (PISA) e.g. Germany and Korea
- **National policies vary in their relative emphasis upon effective institutions and effective young people**

**Back to Australia**

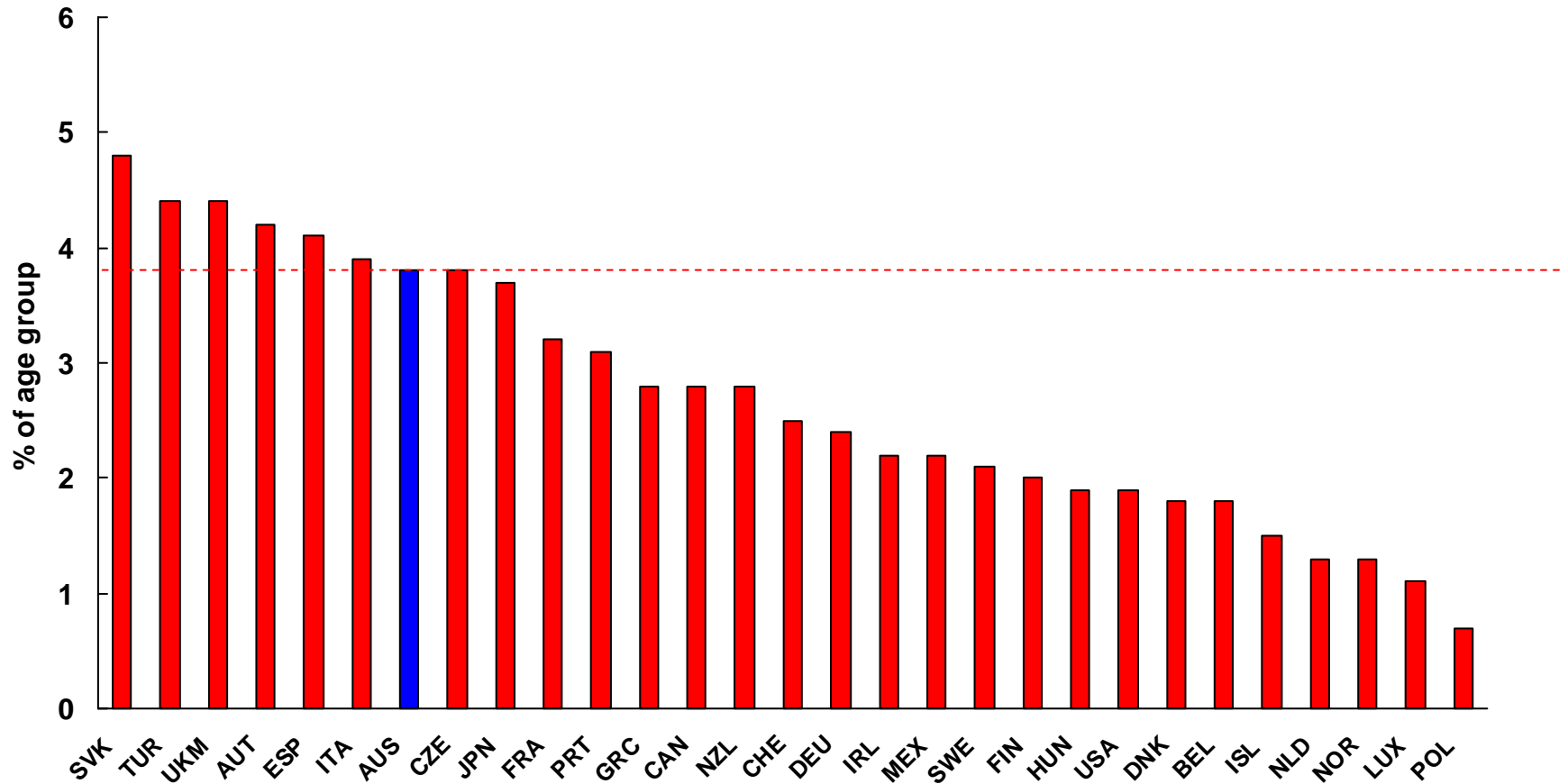
# The main problems

1. Teenage unemployment is too high
2. Too many school leavers miss out on a job or further study
3. Not completing Year 12 comes at a high cost

# 1. Teenage unemployment

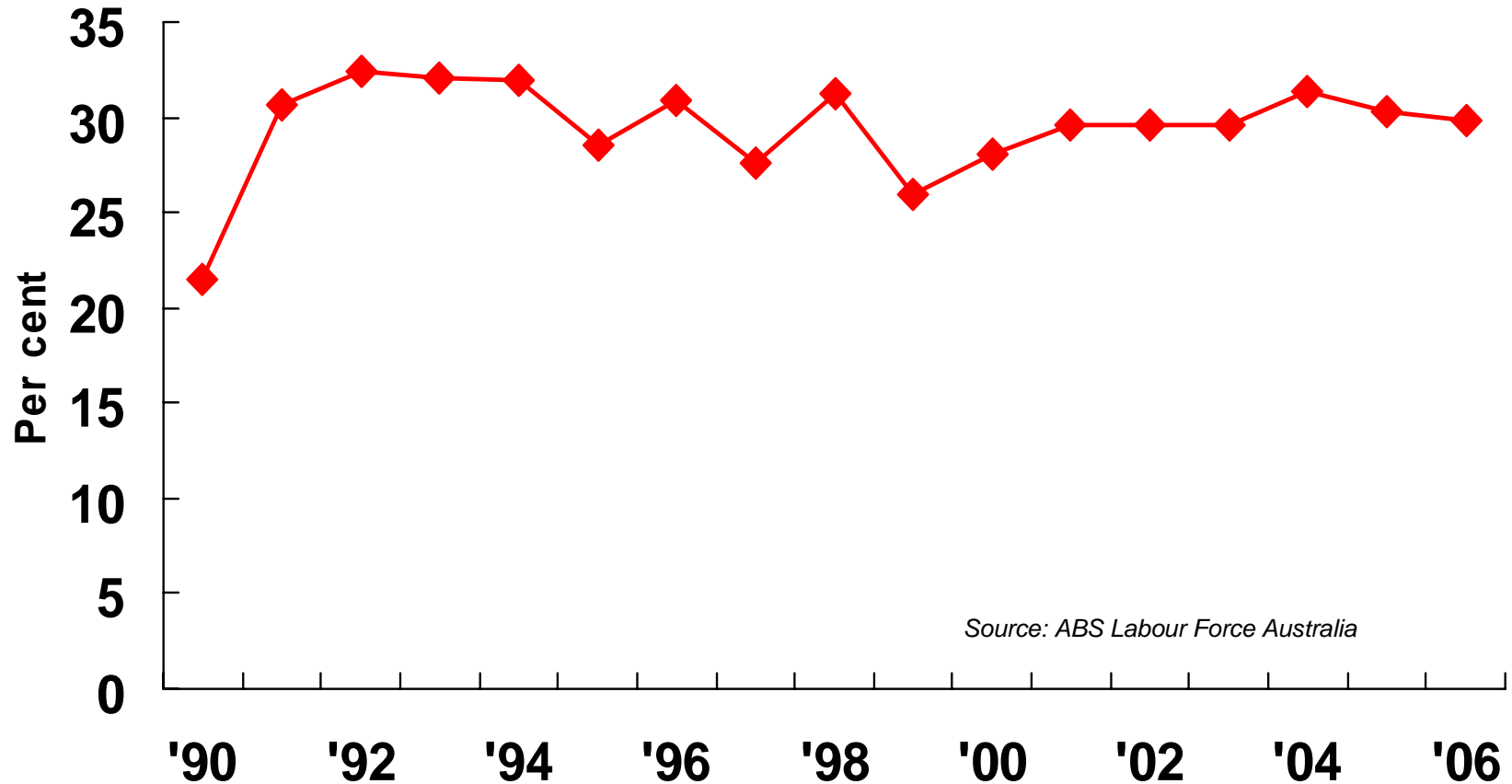
- High by OECD standards
- A level unacceptable in other countries
- Higher than it should be given:
  - Our wealth
  - The health of the labour market

# Teenagers not in education and unemployed, 2005



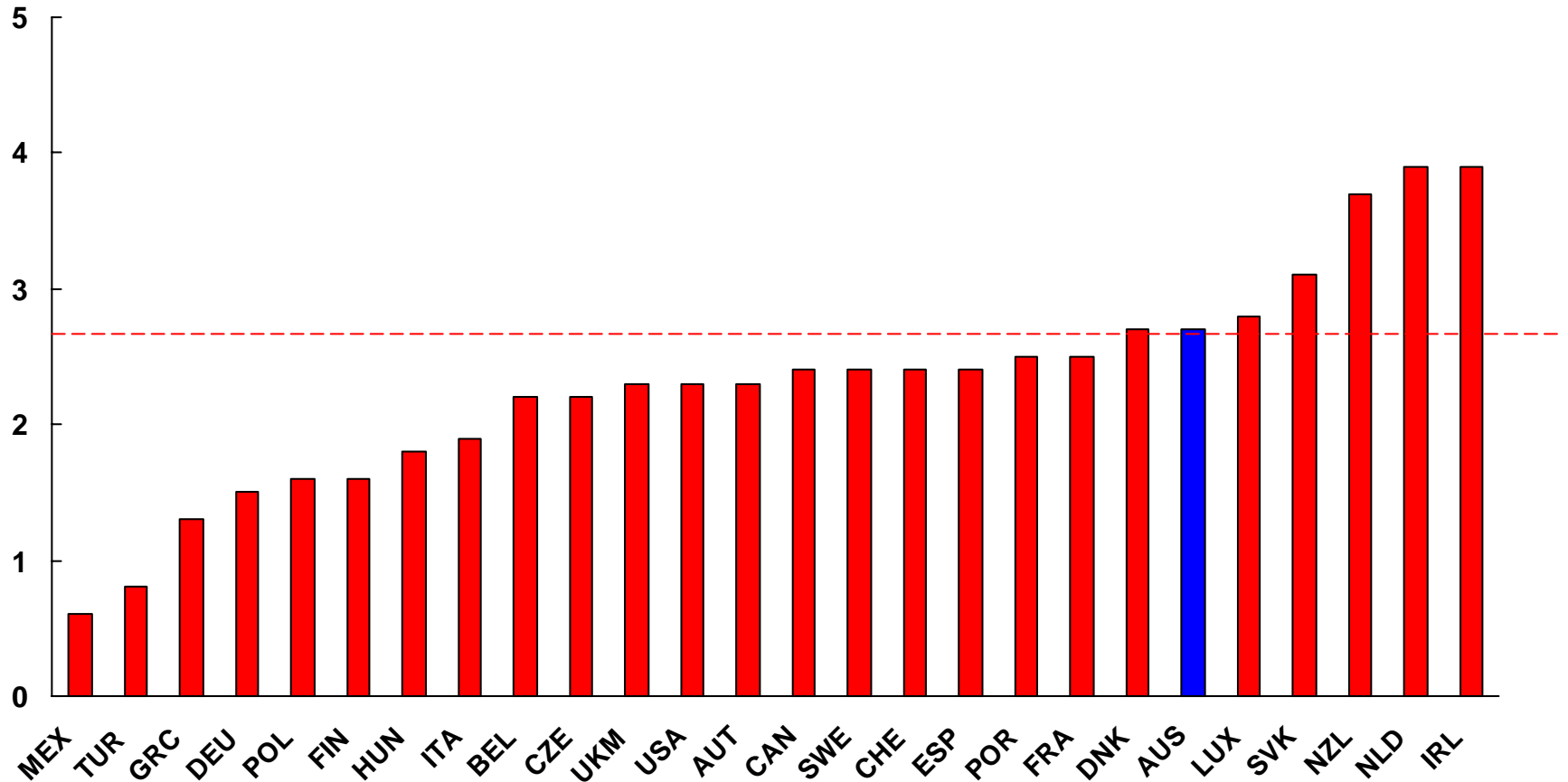
**2.** Too many school leavers miss out on a job or further study

# The proportion of school leavers neither studying full-time nor working full-time has hardly changed



**3.** Not completing Year 12  
comes at a high cost

# Unemployment among those without upper secondary as a multiple of unemployment among those with upper secondary, 20-24 year-olds, 2005



Why do we have these  
problems?

The answer does not lie in the  
labour market

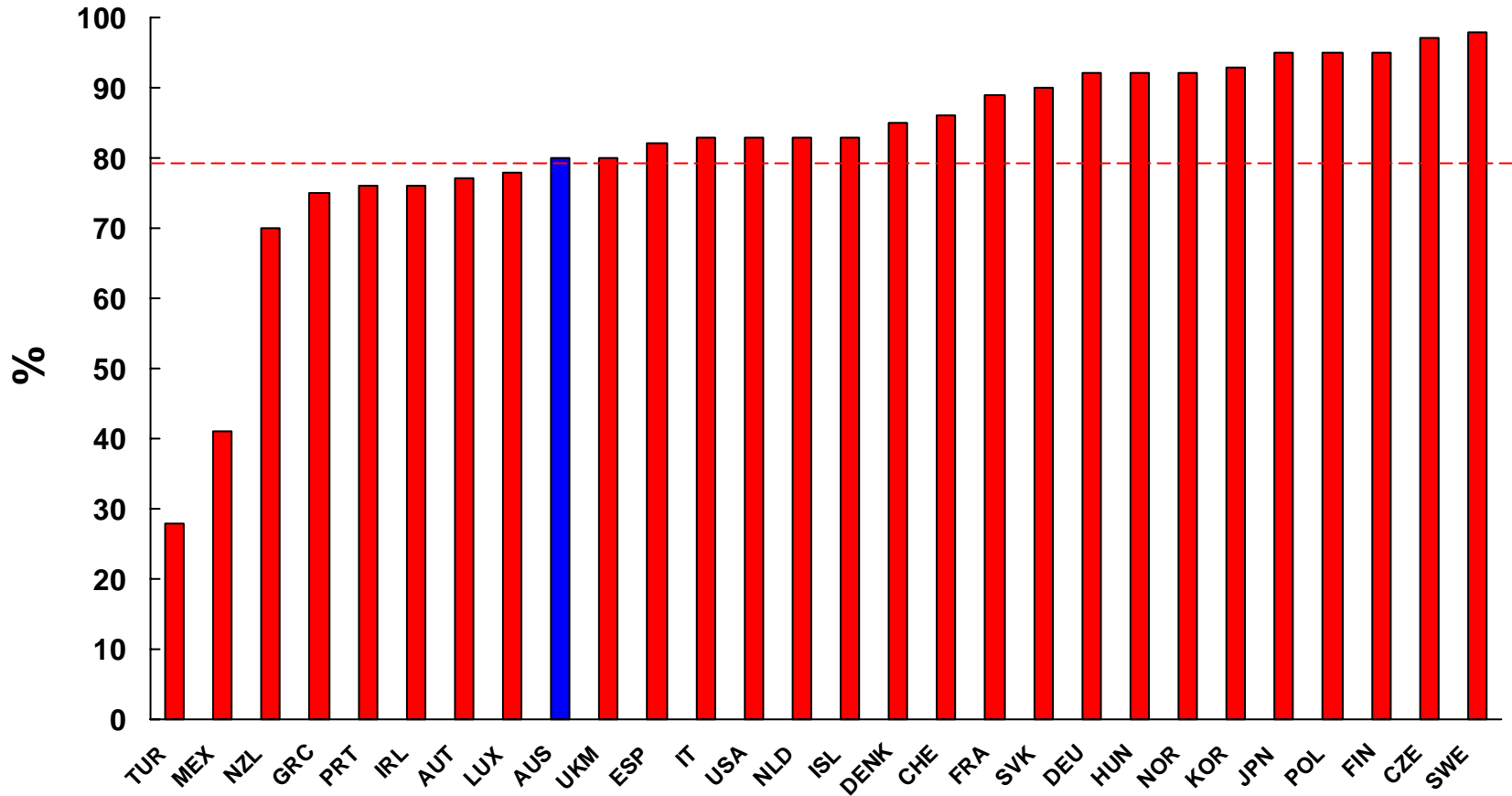
# A “youth friendly” labour market

- Youth wages
- Low employment protection
- Many opportunities for students to work
- Apprenticeships and traineeships

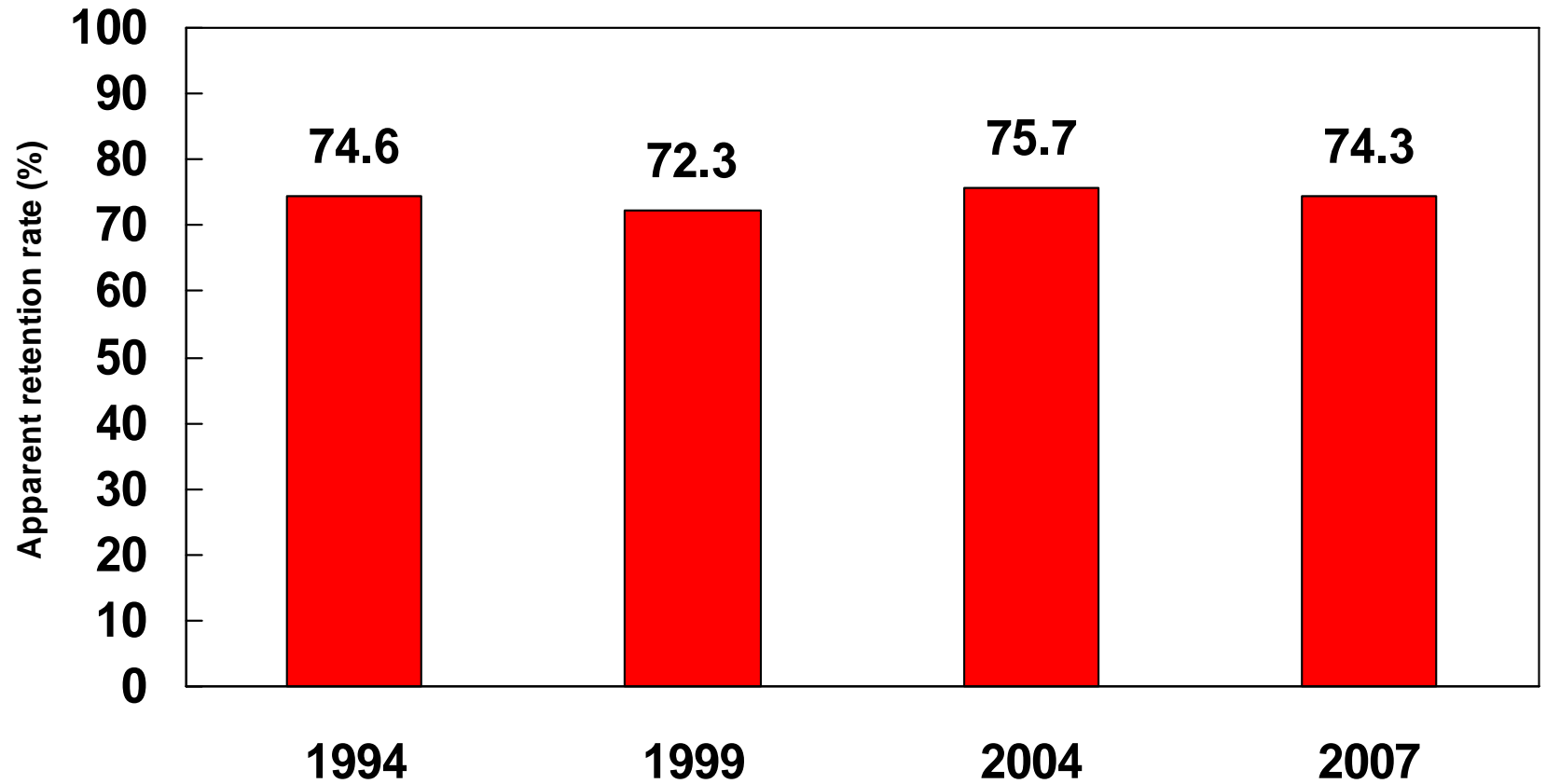
Year 12 completion is too low

There are too many early school  
leavers

# Secondary participation at 17, 2005



# Year 12 completion is going nowhere



“Regrettably, as these latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics clearly show, Australia has a long way to go”

*Julia Gillard, February 2008*

# It's not as if we haven't tried

- VET in schools
- Workplace learning
- School-based apprenticeships
- School-community partnerships
- Transition brokers
- Mentors
- School leaver tracking
- Career advice initiatives
- Etc
- Etc

What should we do?

# Create more effective institutions

In which programmes can work more effectively

That can better meet the needs of all students

And in which the needs of the whole person can be addressed better

# In most schools...

- Curriculum choices are too limited
- It is hard for 16-17 year-olds to be treated as adults
- There are too few support services
  - Guidance and counselling; social work; remedial help
- Grade cohorts are too small
- Older and younger students are bundled in together

# What is the answer?

- Larger grade cohorts to give more curriculum choice
  - To suit the interests and abilities of a wider range of youth
- More adult teaching and learning styles
- Better support services

How?

Senior high schooling...

...for all

**Abolish the 7-12 high  
school**

A **real** education revolution

**How?**

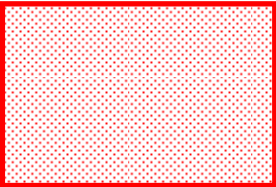
**USA**

USA			



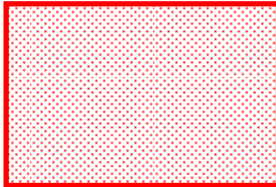
**USA**

A diagram representing a data structure for the USA. It features a blue horizontal bar at the top. Below it is a large red-outlined rectangle. The right side of this rectangle is divided into a grid of 10 rows and 3 columns by red lines. The left side of the rectangle is a single vertical column. A dashed red line extends downwards from the center of the bottom edge of the grid.



**SWEDEN**

A diagram representing a data structure for SWEDEN. It features a blue horizontal bar at the top. Below it is a large red-outlined rectangle divided into five vertical columns by red lines. A dashed red line extends downwards from the center of the bottom edge.



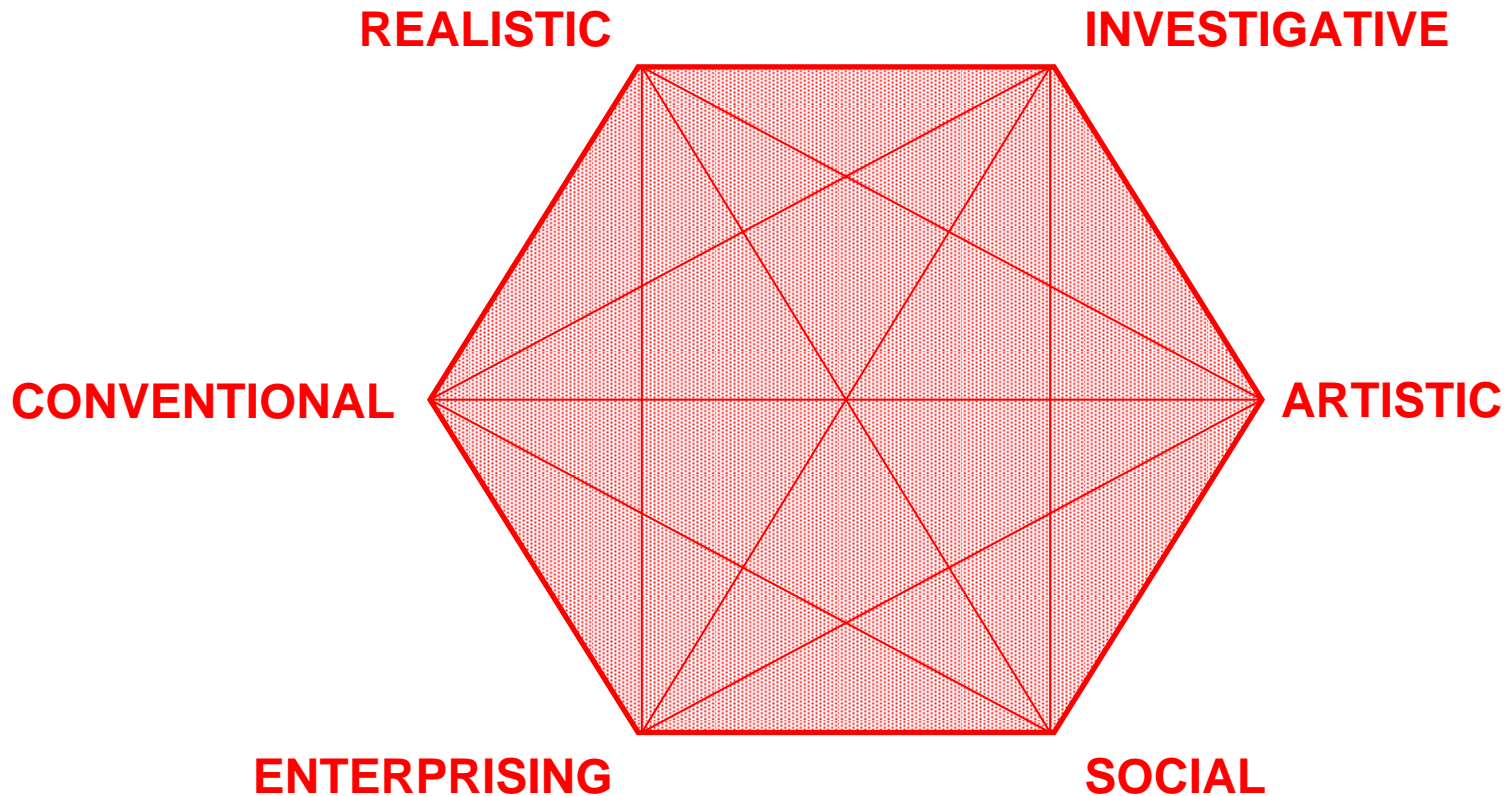


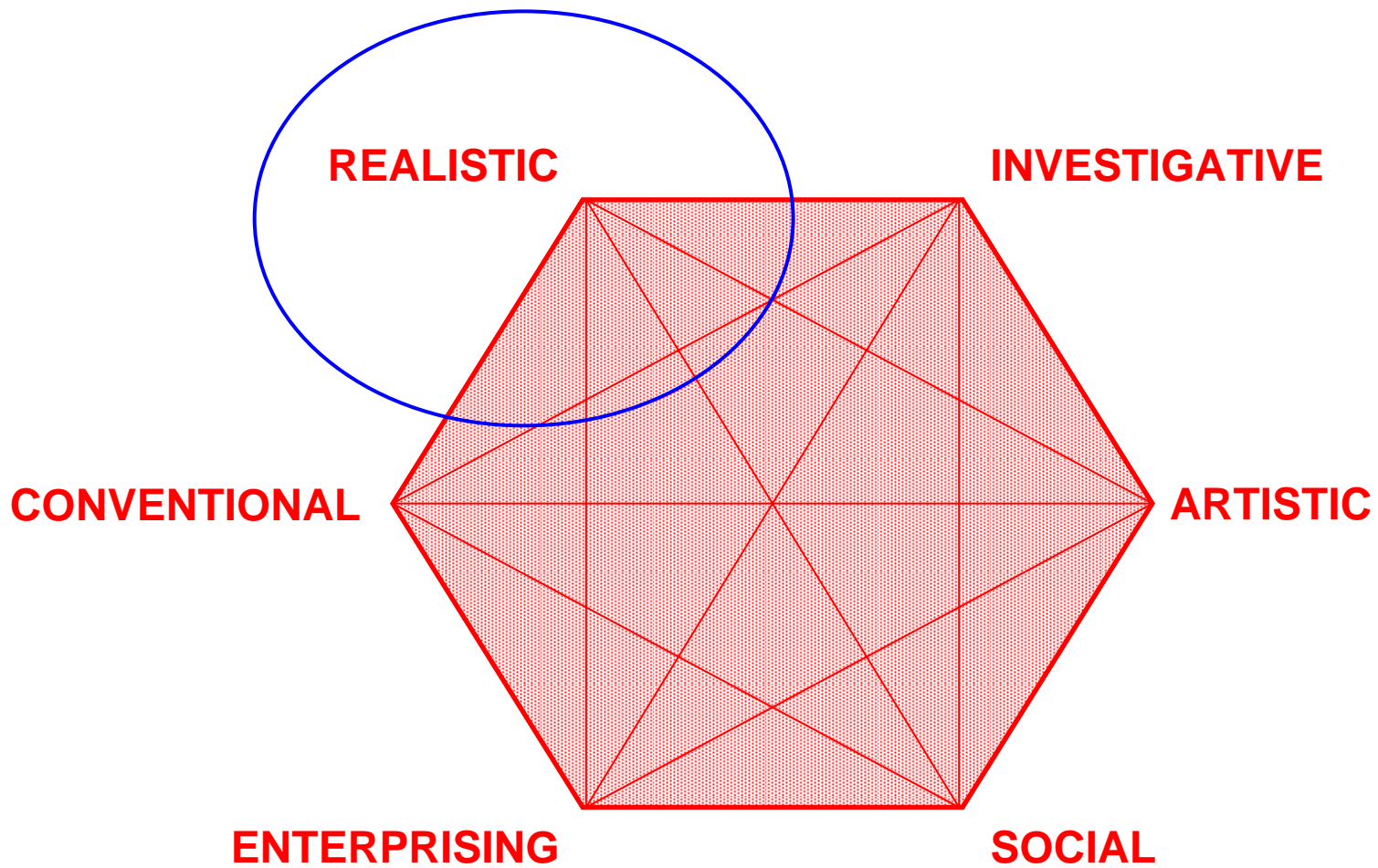


# What *really* matters

- Wide curriculum choice:
  - For all talents and interests
- An adult learning environment
- Support for those who find the going toughest

# Career choice: An elegant and practical model





**Thank you**