

School retention in Australia:

What is the problem? How can we fix it?

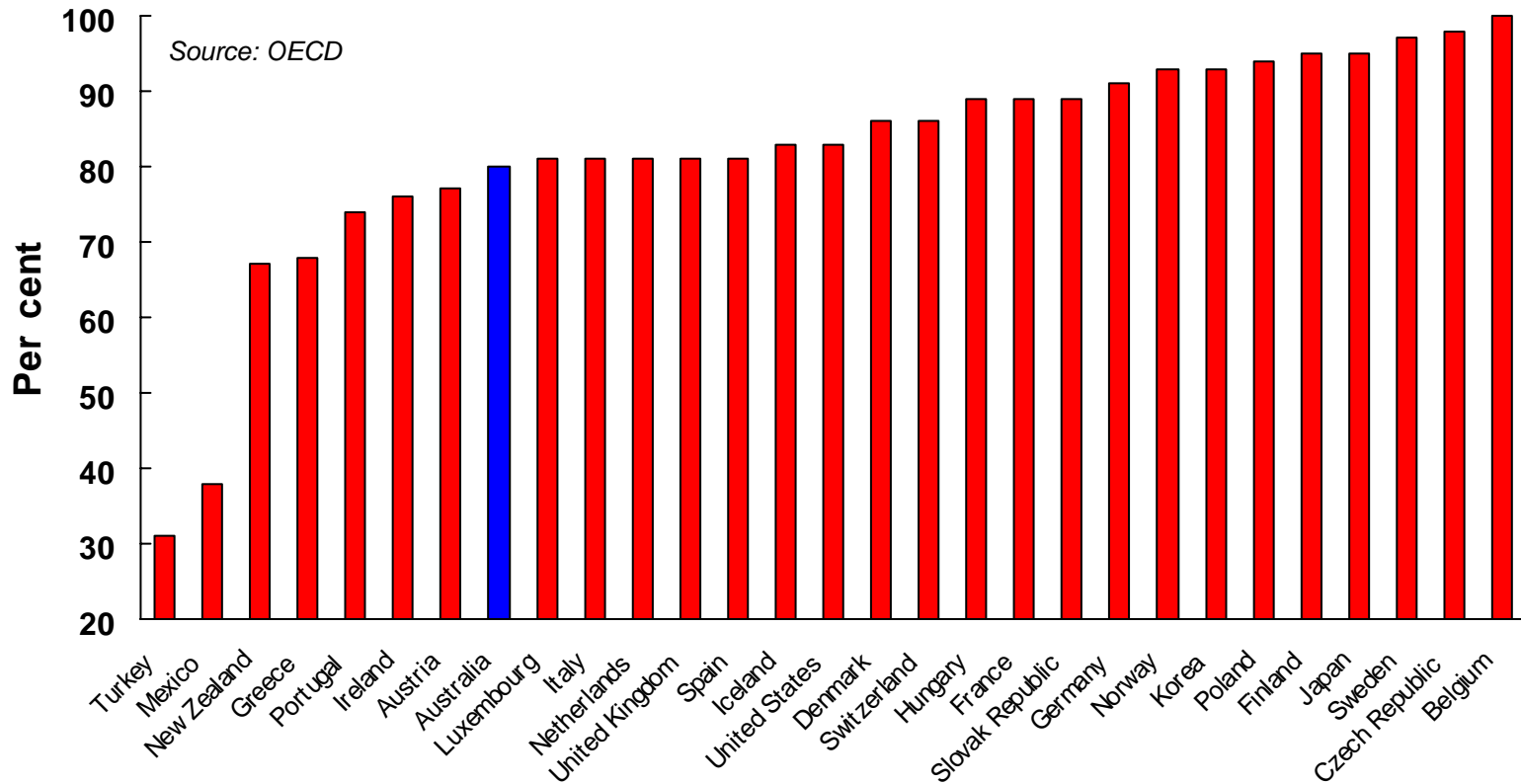
Professor Richard Sweet

Don Dunstan Foundation
Adelaide

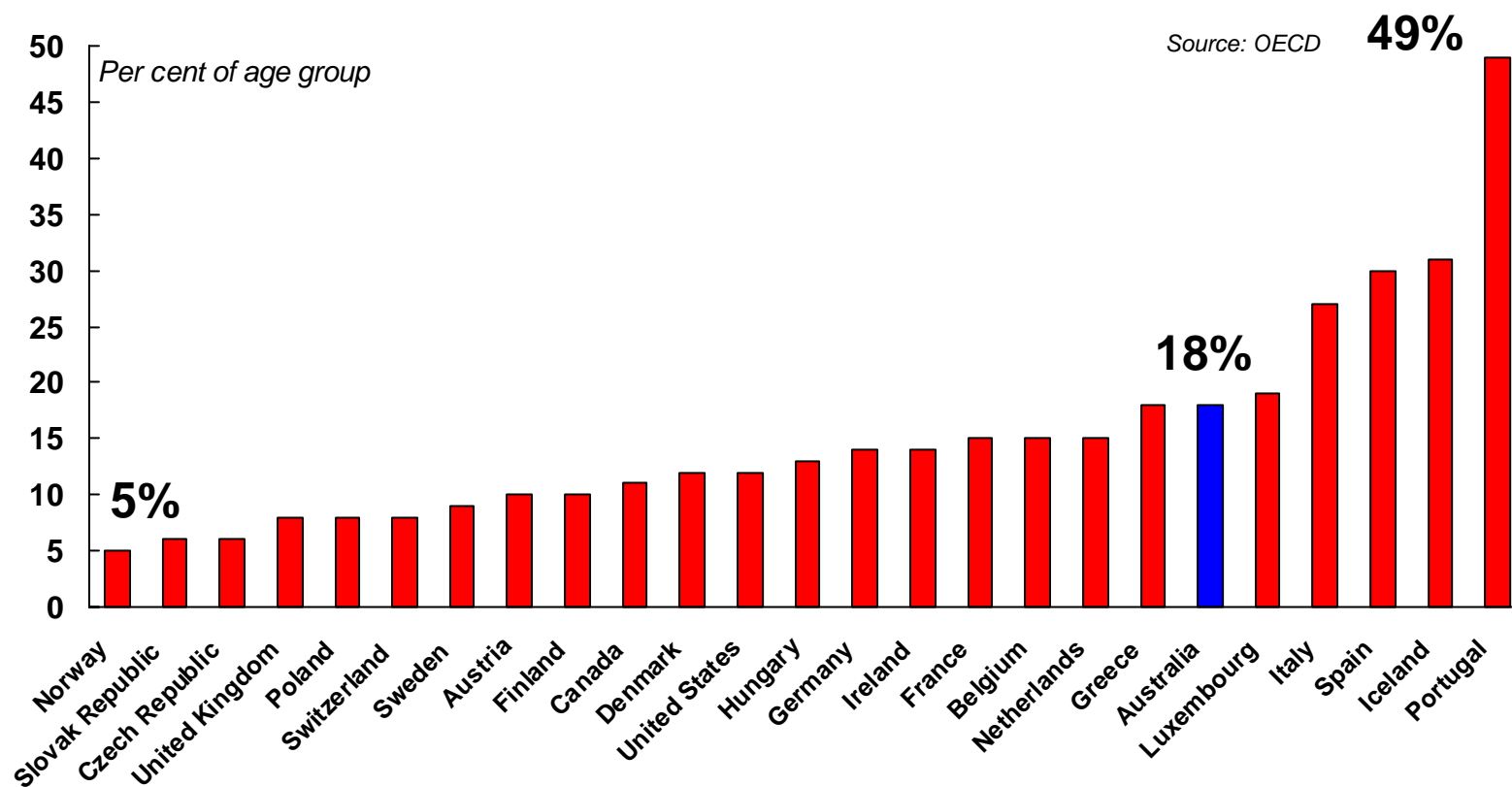
October 27, 2006

Secondary participation and completion in Australia are not high by international standards

Secondary participation at 17, 2004 (Schools plus VET)

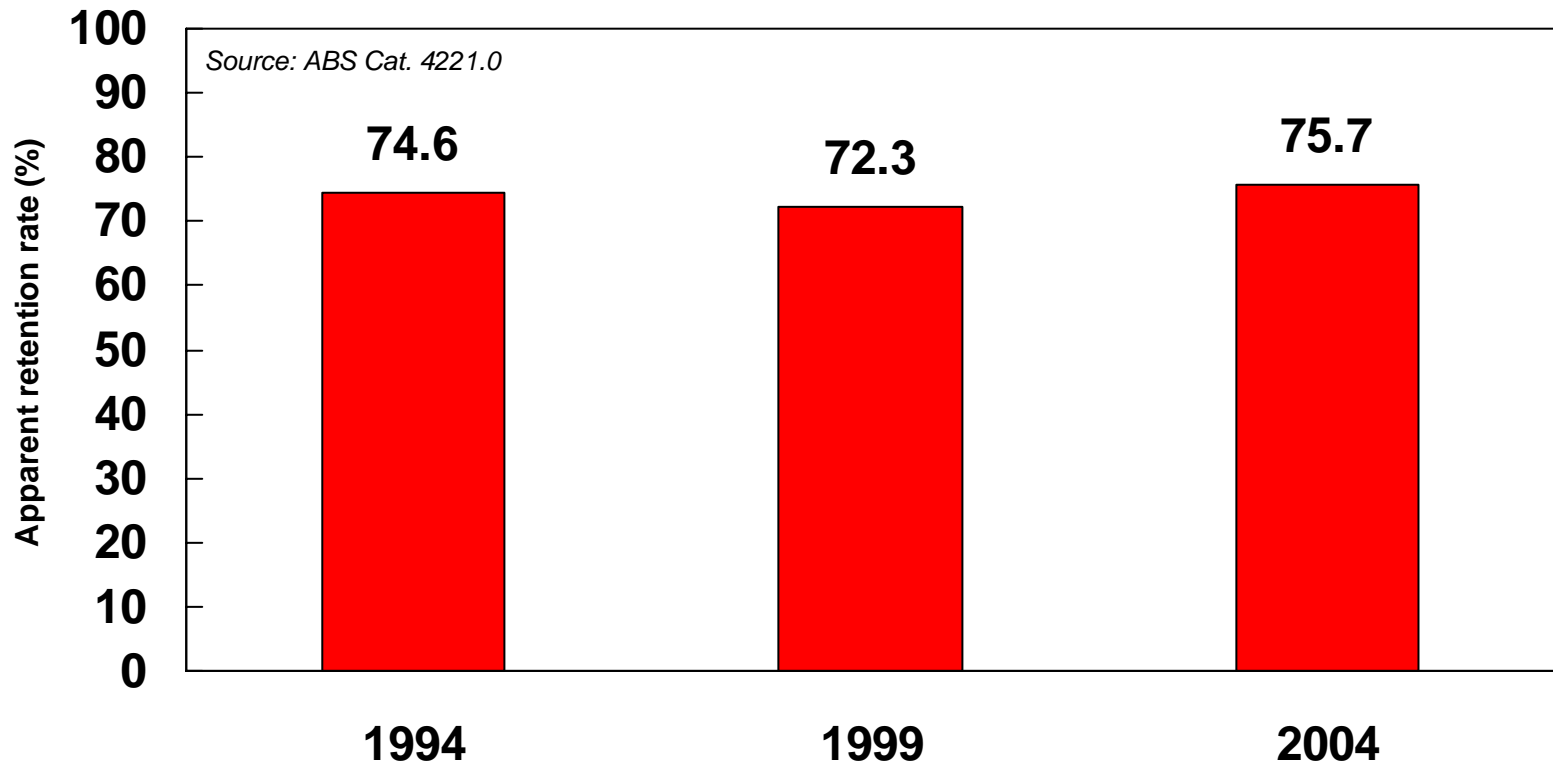


20-24 year-olds without upper secondary qualifications (school and VET)



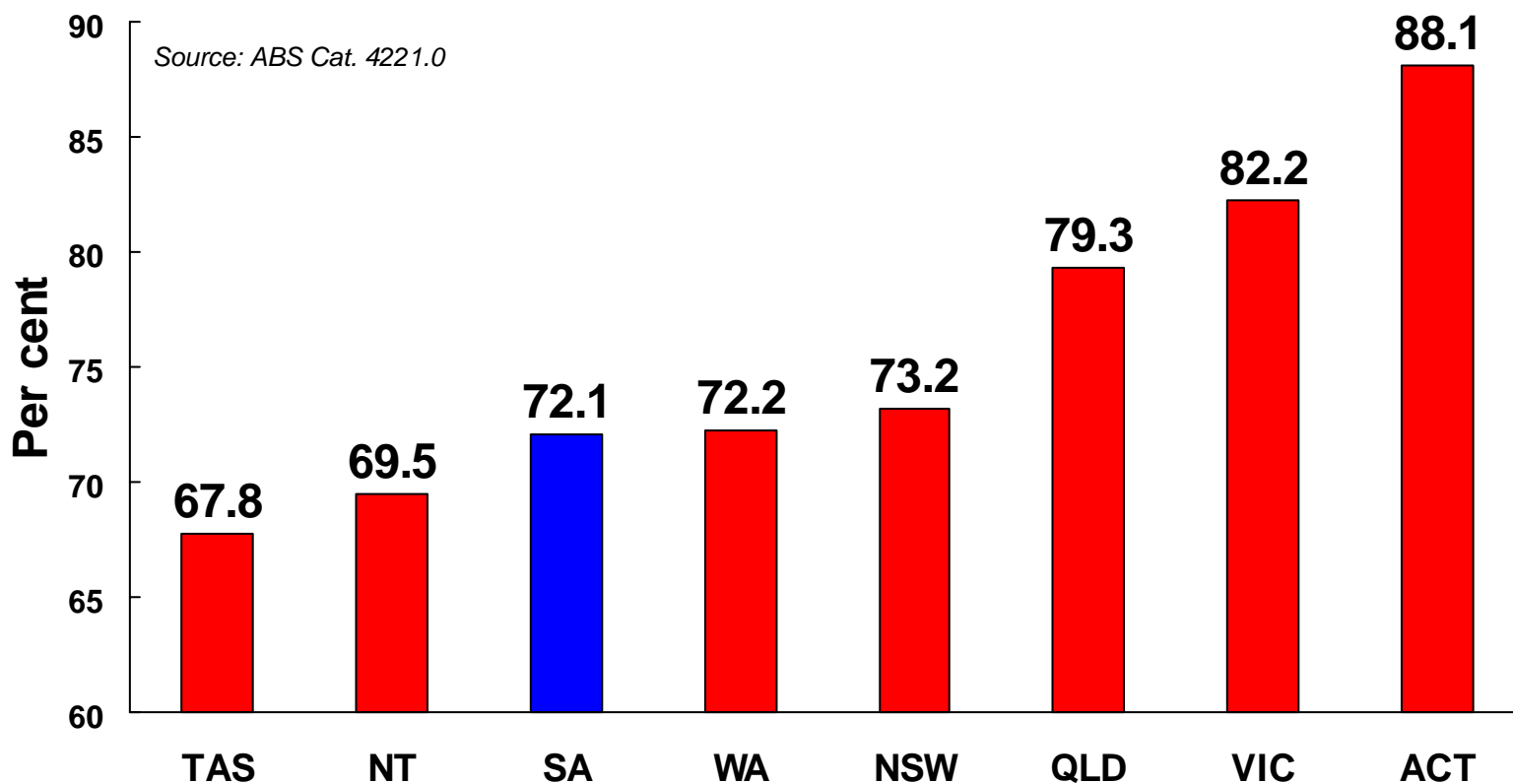
School completion has scarcely
changed in over a decade

Apparent Year 12 retention, Australia, 1994-2004



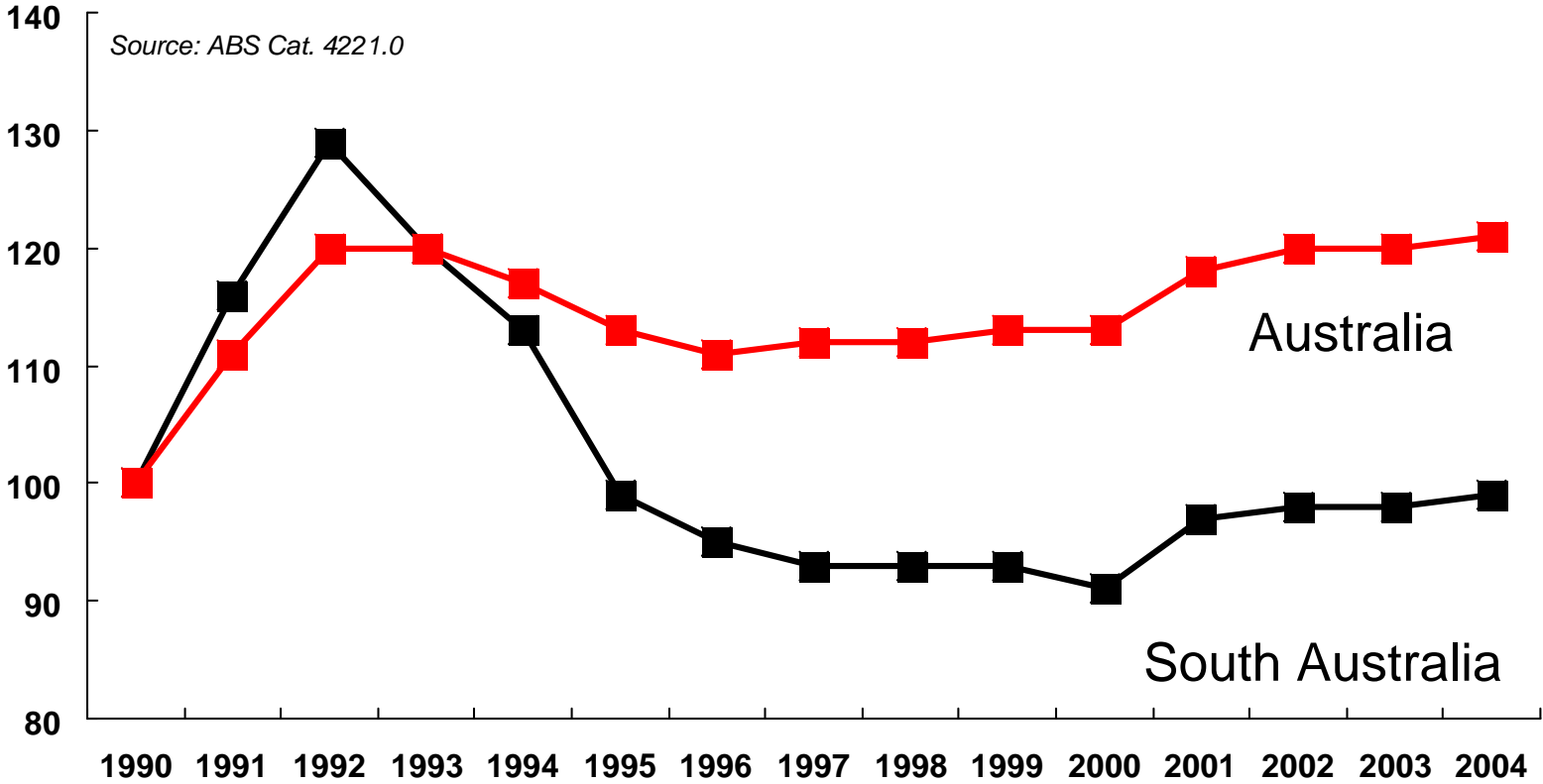
School retention in South
Australia is low by Australian
standards

Apparent Year 12 retention, 2005



And seems to have fallen

Year 12 retention trends (1990=100)



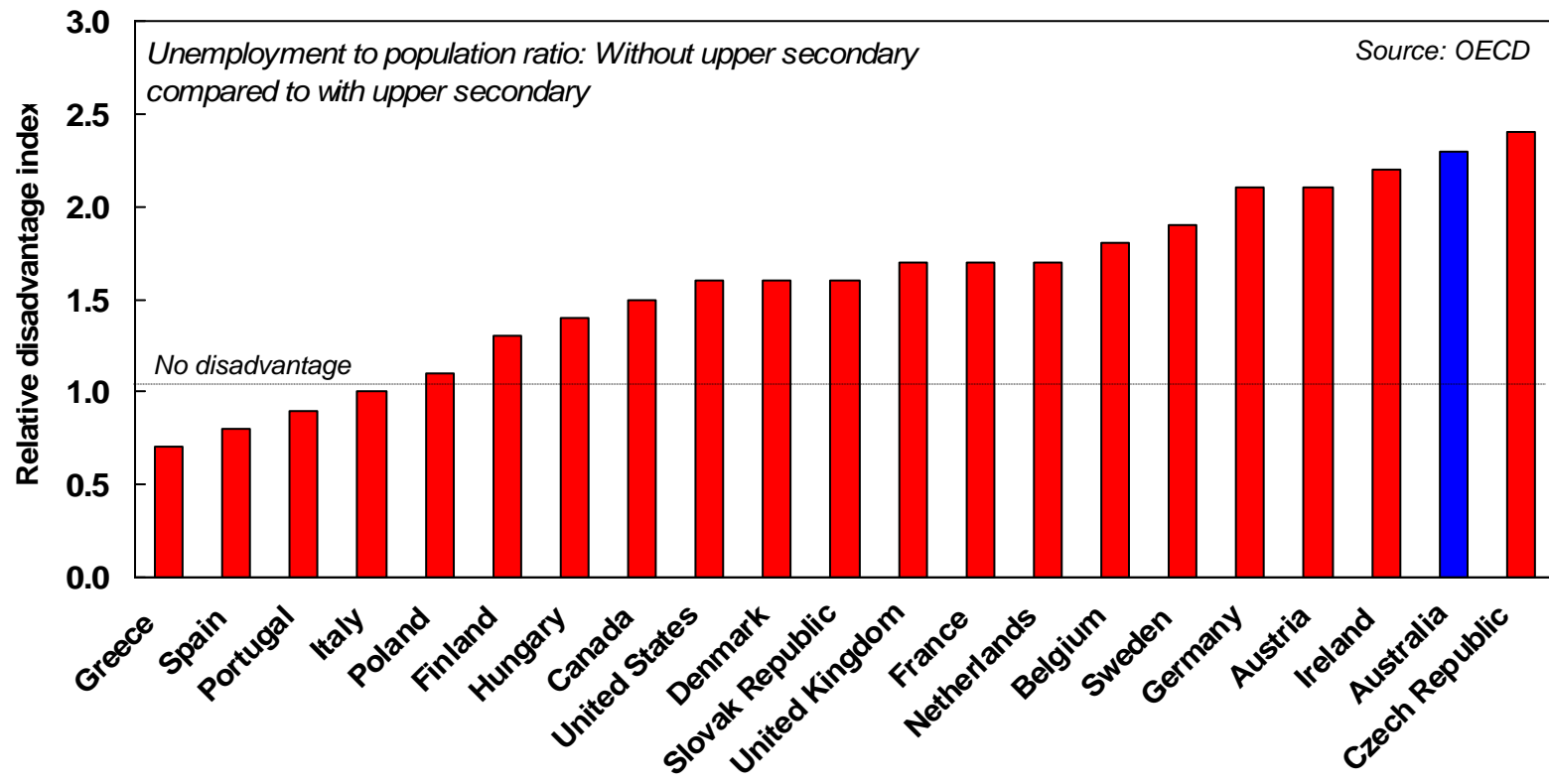
The result?

- We produce too many poorly qualified young people
- For a labour market that has a high level of demand for skills and qualifications

This carries a number of costs

- A direct cost to GDP of around \$9 billion a year (Access Economics, 2005)
- Teenage unemployment that is:
 - High compared to the OECD
 - Higher than it should be given our healthy labour market
- A very high penalty for not completing Year 12

Labour market disadvantage of low-qualified 20-24 year olds, 2002



It's not as if we haven't tried

A decade or more of innovation

- **VET in schools; workplace learning**
- **New Apprenticeships**
- **School-based apprenticeships**
- **School-community partnerships**
- **Transition brokers, mentors**
- **School leaver tracking**
- **Career advice initiatives**
- **Qualification frameworks**
- **New certificates and qualifications**
-

We followed OECD advice

(Mostly)

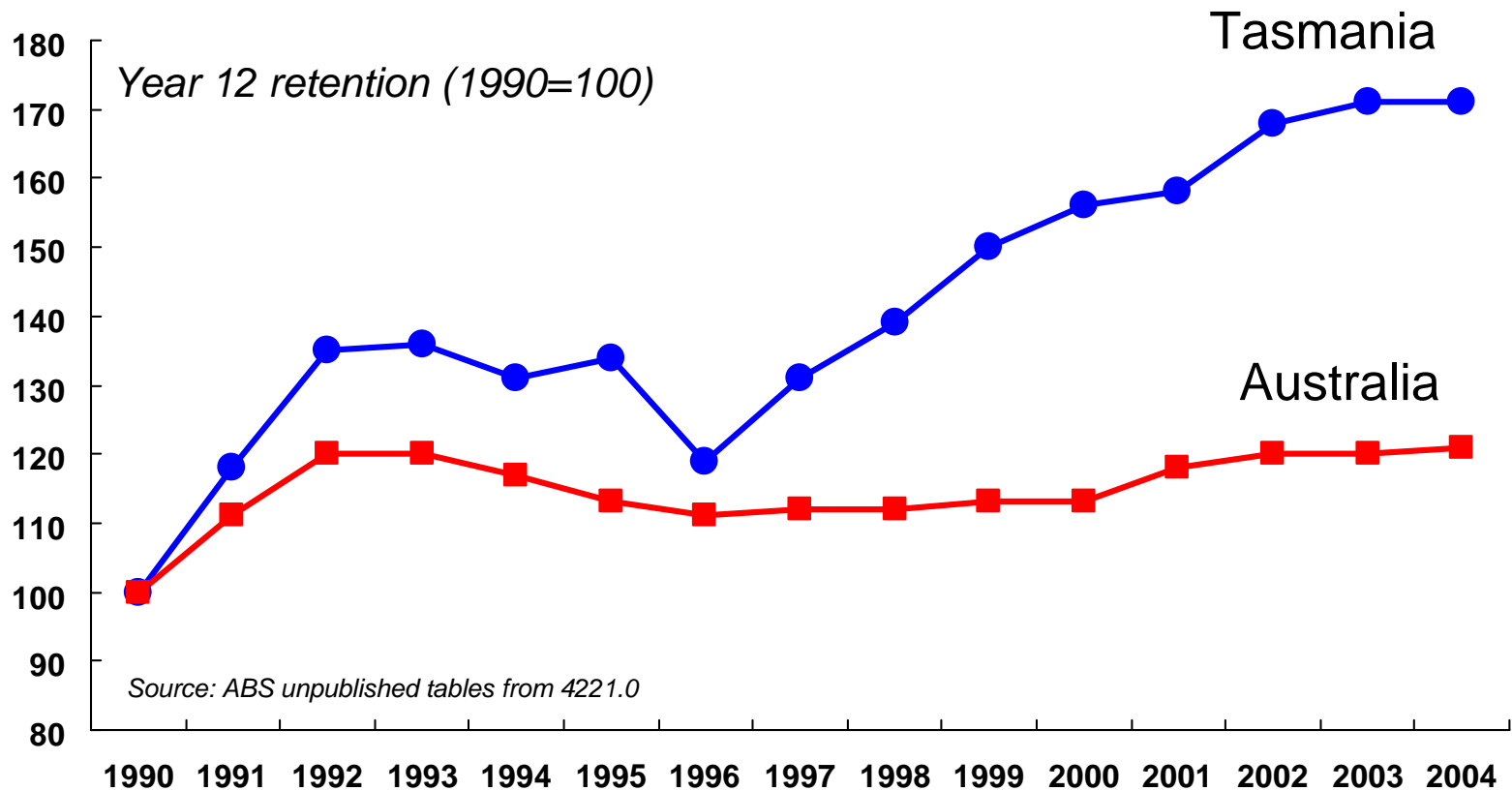
Key features of effective transition systems

- A healthy economy and labour market
- Well organised pathways linking initial education with work and further study
- Many opportunities to combine learning with workplace experience
- Tight safety nets for those at risk
- Good information and guidance
- Effective institutions and processes

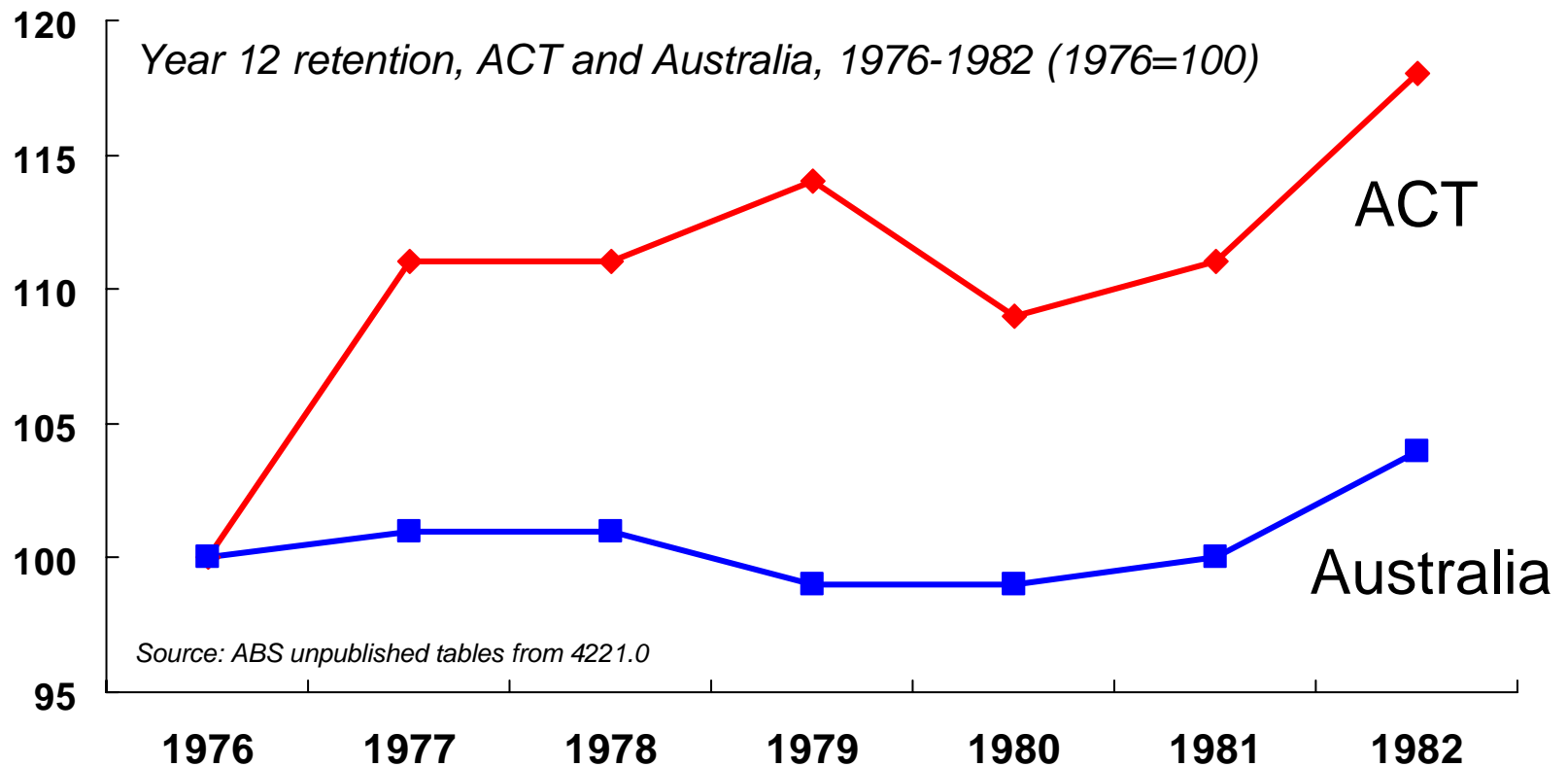
(OECD, 2000)

But nothing seems to have
worked

Except in Tasmania



And the ACT 20 years ago



Which have followed the
standard OECD model

(And OECD advice to develop
more effective institutions)

Separate compulsory and
post-compulsory institutions

Advantages

- Larger grade cohorts
- More curriculum choice for students
- More adult teaching and learning
- Discipline policies for young adults, not Year 9
- Better services for the weakest
- Economies of scale

And the result?

- School is more attractive for young people
- They find that they like learning more
- And so more young people stay at school and finish Year 12

Recent SA proposals?

Certainly a step in the right
direction

Thank you

Norway's safety net for early school leavers

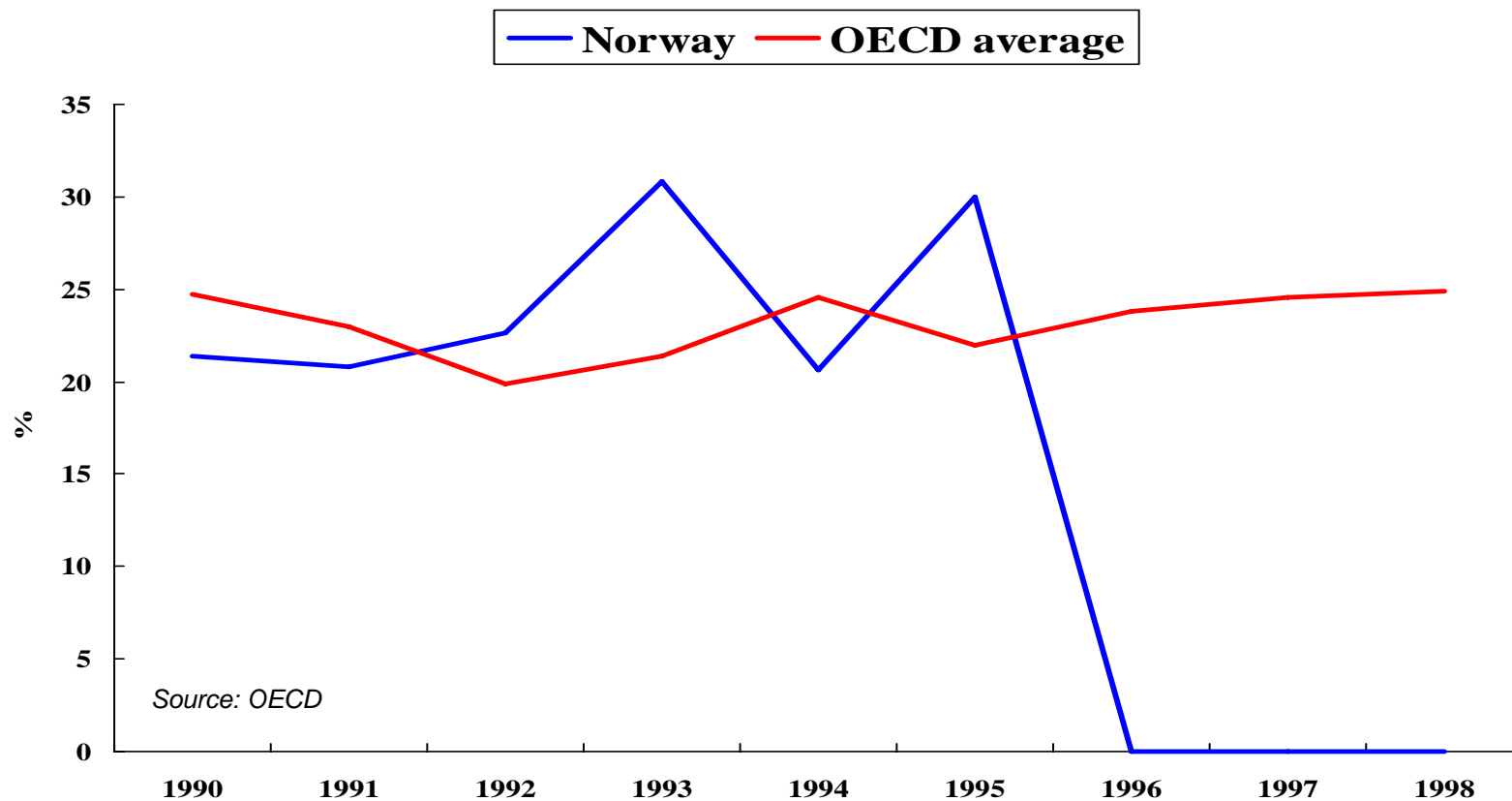
The school context: Entitlements and obligations

- Student entitlements
 - Three years of upper secondary education
 - One of their first three choices of Foundation courses
- Student obligations
 - To take part in the follow-up service in return for income support (if a drop out)
- Schools' obligations
 - To provide all 15 Foundation courses in each County
 - To contact and assist all drop outs

The local follow-up Service

- Carrots and sticks – mutual obligation
- Clear cross-portfolio responsibilities
 - Upper secondary completion the agreed goal
 - No role for the Public Employment Service under the age of 20
- Locally managed and co-ordinated
- Involving several government services
 - Health; housing; justice; education
- Support and guidance
- Many ways back in
- Individualised help
- A rapid impact upon long-term youth unemployment

Long-term unemployment as a share of total: Age 15-19



Long-term unemployment as a share of total: Age 20-24

