

## **AHELO INFORMATION SESSION FOR BIDDERS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

The OECD launched a Call for Tenders for the development and implementation of instruments for the feasibility study for an International Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO). As foreseen in the AHELO Call for Tenders, an information session for bidders was organized and took place on 9 July 2009 at the OECD premises in Paris, from 2:00-4:30pm.

A total of 11 individuals representing 7 different organizations expressed interest in attending the meeting – either in person, or through telephone or video-link. Subsequently, 2 of them cancelled their participation.

As a result, participants in the information session included:

- From the OECD Secretariat side: Barbara Ischinger (Director for Education), Richard Yelland (Head of IMHE programme), Karine Tremblay (Project manager, AHELO), Diane Lalancette (Assessment analyst, AHELO), Fabrice Henard (Analyst, AHELO), Takashi Sukegawa (Analyst, AHELO) and Mathieu Cahen (OECD Central Purchasing Group)
- From the AHELO Group of National Experts: Jan Levy (Norway, Chair of the AHELO Group of National Experts)
- From ACER: Hamish Coates and John Creswell
- From CITO: Anton Beguin, Henk Moelands and Will Knappers
- From ETS: Thomas Van Essen
- From IEA: Dirk Hastedt and Oliver Neuschmidt
- From NFER: Jenny Bradshaw

The session started with a presentation by the OECD Secretariat of the AHELO feasibility study, the terms of reference of the AHELO Call for Tenders and the practical considerations to be borne in mind when submitting a proposal.

The powerpoint presentation is available at [www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo/callfortenders](http://www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo/callfortenders)

Prospective bidders were then invited to ask any question they had on the Call for Tenders or its terms of reference. These questions are listed below, together with the answers provided by the OECD Secretariat.

## **On instruments for the various strands of work**

### ***Question: What is the status of the Generic Skills Strand of work?***

**Answer:** The AHELO Group of National Experts (GNE) has agreed to use the Collegiate Learning Assessment for the feasibility study, to assess the extent to which the type of generic skills measured by the CLA can be validly measured in an international context. The adaptation of the instrument for international use is therefore excluded from the Call for Tenders, and discussions with the Council for Aid to Education (CAE) are currently underway for this part of the work.

However the implementation of the CLA test is included in the Call for Tenders as an optional part of Module E to foster synergies across the different strands. Bidders have the possibility to bid for this optional part.

Should bidders submit a proposal for that option, they should note that the CAE has developed a test and scoring methodology, and will want to see evidence that its intellectual property and test security is protected to cooperate on test implementation. Proposals should therefore provide clear evidence that advanced negotiations with CAE are underway (*e.g.* through an informal agreement) and that such negotiations are likely to result in a formal agreement with the CAE (although the formalization of such agreement may occur at a later stage).

The absence of tangible on-going negotiations with CAE when submitting a proposal would dismiss the bid for that option. However, bidders should note that proposals will not be evaluated on the basis of whether they include the optional part.

### ***Question: Who is the contact point at CAE regarding the optional implementation of the CLA test?***

**Answer:** Bidders interested in submitting a proposal for the implementation of the CLA may contact:

Roger Benjamin (President of the Council for Aid to Education)  
215 Lexington Avenue, 21st Floor  
New York, NY 10016-6023  
Main: (212) 661-5800  
Direct: (212) 217-0808  
Fax: (212) 661-9766  
email: [rbenjamin@cae.org](mailto:rbenjamin@cae.org)

### ***Question: Concerning economics and engineering, do you already have an instrument in mind like for the Generic Skills Strand of work?***

**Answer:** No. Unlike the Generic Skills Strand with the CLA, there is no pre-existing instrument targeted for the discipline-strands for adaptation to an international context. The OECD has carried out some initial work in identifying existing instruments assessing learning outcomes in higher education (Nusche, 2007) and reflecting on expected learning outcomes in the 2 disciplines chosen for the feasibility study (Tuning Association, 2009a, 2009b), but there is no specific instrument in mind for economics and engineering.

This initial work is provided for information, and bidders are free to use it or use existing instruments and question items. However, they should note that the focus at the feasibility study stage is on ensuring cross cultural validity and comparability of instruments.

What the AHELO GNE made clear however, is that AHELO is looking for above-content types of items, focusing on the application of knowledge to real-life tasks or situations rather than tasks assessing cognitive knowledge, PISA-style test items if you like. Indeed, content-based items could lead to uniformization of programme curricula in the longer term, and this would contradict AHELO's objective to assess learning outcomes in a way that respects and preserves the diversity of institutional missions and programme offers.

***Question: Do you plan to gauge generic skills like communication skills etc. as part of the discipline-specific assessments?***

***Answer:*** At the feasibility study stage, it is expected that generic skills will be assessed essentially through the Generic Skills Strand of work, so this should not be the main focus of the discipline-specific assessments. This being said, the experts involved in the initial work have called for some degree of overlap between the strands of work, and the assessments for the discipline-strands could therefore include some generic-type questions manifested in a disciplinary context.

***Question: Are the response times indicated in the terms of reference strict parameters?***

***Answer:*** Experts consulted for the contextual dimension have advised to keep the response burden under control, especially for the student and faculty surveys. This is perceived to be somewhat less of a constraint for institutional and programme leadership surveys since responding leaders will volunteer to participate in the feasibility study and will grasp benefits in terms of diagnosis and scope for upgrading their teaching.

With respect to the assessments, response times should also be carefully gauged in the proposals in order to balance information needs with the objectives of the feasibility study, the impact of response time on the practicality of implementation and the need to limit the cost of translation to be borne by participating countries.

On this latter point, the Chair of the AHELO GNE stressed that participating countries are sensitive to the costs of national implementation. The feasibility study is meant to result in a proof of concept, not to design the ideal instruments. Instruments should thus be practically and appropriately sized to ensure that they will not be attacked from technical standpoint, while avoiding excessive costs deriving from too comprehensive and perfect instruments.

### **About testing and implementation**

***Question: Do contractors have to pre-test in all countries?***

***Answer:*** Pre-testing of instruments is encouraged to be developed at international level in order to test the cultural validity of items at an early stage. However the methodological approach for pre-testing is the responsibility of bidders and alternatives can be proposed.

***Question: With respect to delivery of instruments, can we propose a different mode of survey management system – ex. online delivery?***

***Answer:*** Yes, alternative test delivery modes can be suggested by bidders (*e.g.* on-line delivery). However contractor(s) should bear in mind the objectives of the feasibility study. We have to confirm that it is scientifically possible to measure learning outcomes across countries, languages and cultures, not to demonstrate that it is possible to do so electronically or online.

Although we recognise that electronic or online delivery is a promising direction for the future if an AHELO main study was to be launched, the timeline for the feasibility study is tight and contractor(s) should make sure that electronic delivery does not unduly delay the work or add superfluous costs.

***Question: Who owns the intellectual property rights on the the electronic platforms already used in other OECD international assessments (PISA and PIAAC)***

***Answer:*** The PISA platform (TAO) is in the public domain. A condition of the Contractor accessing and using TAO is that the Contractor must allow CRPHT to include any modules or other software developments relating to TAO made by the Organisation in the open source release of TAO.

In the case of PIAAC, the OECD owns intellectual property of the PIAAC platform (both master and national versions). The platform has been developed using open source software and is intended to be available for modification and adaptation by countries and others.

***Question: Who is responsible for scoring?***

***Answer:*** It is the responsibility of countries to recruit/cover the costs of scorers, but under the guidance and supervision of contractor(s). The contractor(s) is responsible for the development of scoring procedures – including the decision of whether to centralize/decentralize scoring – and the training of country representatives in these procedures.

In this respect, bidders should note that countries are sensitive to national implementation issues and will need to plan the recruitment of their national teams shortly. Bidders are therefore encouraged and invited to include in their proposals estimates of resource needs and implementation costs at national level. These should not be restricted to financial costs, but include issues of time and human resources to be allocated *etc.*

#### **About interactions with stakeholders**

***Question: How do you expect contractors to be involved with stakeholders?***

***Answer:*** The OECD will take prominent responsibility in interactions with stakeholders, but the contractor(s) is expected to be fully involved in the community of stakeholders.

First and foremost, the contractor(s) is expected to involve the academic community and experts in subject matter experts groups for the disciplines strands. Indeed, while making the tests feasible is the key point, the process for instrument development needs to be inclusive enough so that the resulting tests are appealing for the academic community and that faculty can see the usefulness of the test. Efforts aimed at ensuring the participation and acceptance of the higher education sector and of the professional communities will be a plus in the evaluation of proposals.

The contractor(s) will also get to discuss progress and methodological aspects with the Stakeholders' Consultative Group, and to participate actively on the interactive Web 2.0 platform that is intended to foster dialogue with and among stakeholders. To start with, the accepted proposal by the OECD will be presented to the AHELO Stakeholders Consultative Group for discussion.

## **About the financing of the AHELO feasibility study**

### ***Question: How is the financing of the AHELO feasibility study organized?***

**Answer:** The international development costs for the AHELO feasibility study will be contributed by countries and foundations. As of today, 10 participating countries are contributing financially, with the additional financial support of a non participating country.

Grants are also expected from a range of foundations and organizations, and a fundraising campaign is underway to secure the necessary funds. Some foundations expressed their interests and are supporting this project. However, it should be noted that the impact of the financial crisis on foundations' endowments and public budgets makes fundraising more challenging nowadays than it was a year ago, and bidders should keep this constraint in mind in proposing cost-effective methodological approaches.

It is anticipated that fundraising will become easier as the feasibility study unfolds and gains momentum, with intermediate results raising the interest of potential grant-makers. This pattern may require a staged contracts' approach.

## **On decision-making process and negotiations**

### ***Question: When can a contract be expected to be signed?***

**Answer:** While the AHELO GNE is expected to make a decision in early September, it can only make a proposal to the OECD Procurement Board. It is only once a draft contract is approved by the Procurement Board that a contract can be presented to the OECD Secretary General for signature, together with the Procurement Board 's opinion on the proposals (*i.e.* the best Value for money for the OECD).

Contractors should note that the Procurement Board is held only once a month hence the expected starting time with a GNE decision in early September is October 2009. This depends however on an agreement being made on a draft contract fairly rapidly. For this reason, pre-selected bidders will be contacted in mid-August to start discussing the terms of an eventual contract as soon as possible. Any comments on the legal procedure as stated in legal instructions will then be welcomed.

### ***Question: Can the work be started before a contract is formalized with the OECD?***

**Answer:** No, the OECD regulations do not allow work to be undertaken before a formal agreement is signed by the OECD. But the OECD Central Purchasing Group is fully aware that timelines are tight, and will do the utmost to speed up the process (*e.g.* by starting discussions with all pre-selected contractors ahead of the AHELO GNE decision).

## **Beyond the feasibility study**

Finally, the OECD Secretariat reminded participants that the feasibility nature of the work prevented the OECD to commit with any contractor beyond the feasibility study, and that another Call for Tenders would be necessary should an AHELO main study be launched upon its completion.

However, this project should be seen as an investment in the future of higher education by all parties, including bidding organisations.