



IMHE
 Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education
Programme sur la gestion des établissements d'enseignement supérieur

Outcomes of higher education:
 Quality, relevance and impact

8 - 10 September
 Paris, France 2008

Enseignement supérieur :
 qualité, pertinence et impact

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OECD Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) Feasibility Study

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The context: key trends

1. **Growth**
 → Pressure on budgets
2. **Diversification of provision**
 → Growth of vocationally-oriented HEIs & private provision in some countries
3. **More heterogenous student bodies**
 → Rising participation by female and mature students, greater heterogeneity in socio-economic backgrounds than in the past
4. **New governance arrangements**
 → Growing autonomy... coupled with greater accountability requirements, development of quality assurance systems
5. **New funding arrangements**
 → Diversification of sources (cost-sharing), increasing focus on accountability and performance



The context: key trends

6. **Internationalisation**
 → Bologna Process, internationalisation of curricula, emergence of cross-border delivery, growth in international student mobility worldwide



EAG 2008
 Box C3.1

7. **Change in the demand for skills**
 → Advent of the knowledge economy: from routine/manual tasks to nonroutine, analytic and interactive tasks
8. **Impact of international rankings**
 → Research biased, need for alternatives to capture learning outcomes



The context: key trends

9. National and regional drivers

- **Europe:** Bologna, development of learning outcomes, 'Tuning' project
- **USA:** (1) Spellings Commission (focus on accreditation, accountability, access, affordability) and (2): Culture of testing and assessment (Collegiate Learning Assessment, National Survey of Student Engagement)
- **Japan and Korea:** loss of confidence in the quality of tertiary education
- **China:** demand from consumers and those advising them
- **UK and USA** especially: demand for relevant customer information

→ All trends going in the same direction

- Greater attention to quality by stakeholders
 - **Students and employers** (better-informed choices)
 - **HEIs, departments or faculties** (comparative strengths and weaknesses)
 - **Policymakers** (stocks/flows high-level skills, impact of policy decisions)
- OECD Education Ministers Meeting, Athens (June 2006)
 - **From quantity to quality**



OECD response: AHELO

• 3 experts' meetings to explore the scope for an international assessment

- Washington (April 2007): desirability of an AHELO
- Paris (July 2007): exploring the conceptual possibility
- Seoul (October 2007) and after: from possibility to feasibility

• A feasibility study

- A research approach to provide a proof of concept
- Allows exploring several directions/methodologies
- Open-mindedness towards outcomes
- Informal Ministerial Meeting, Tokyo (January 2008): engaged discussions and support for OECD approach provided it takes account of institutional diversity



HEIs as units of analysis

From whom to 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 at national level

• Focus on measures at the level of HEIs, departments or faculties

- Combining the definition of OECD measures of quality with reliable assessment methods to which HEIs could voluntarily subscribe... and which might progressively find wider acceptance.
- Reporting at institutional (*vs* student) level to permit wide substantive coverage with a limited response time burden (matrix techniques)



Multidimensional definition of quality

Addressing the needs of various users and uses

- **Stakeholders and information needs**
 - Prospective students and employers interested in the *"bottom line" of the performance of HEIs*, departments or faculties
 - Individuals, HEIs and policymakers interested in the *"value-added" by the HEIs* to assess the quality of services provided
 - OECD committed to explore both kinds of outcomes measures, but sequentially given the layers of complexity involved in the latter
- **The relevance of contextual data...**
... to make the assessment an effective tool to reveal best practices and to identify shared problems



Multidimensional definition of quality

What to assess?

- **Our measures need to reflect the quality of outcomes**
Capture what students know and can do
- **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
- **... as well as transversal higher-order competencies**
 - Strengths
 - Less dependent on occupational and cultural contexts, applicable across HEIs
 - 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.



Some practical considerations

- **Target population**
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 HEIs?**
Performance profiles and contextual data
Their own results and those of other HEIs (anonymously)
- **What feedback to students?**
How to motivate them?



The AHELO feasibility study

- **Goal**
... to assess whether reliable cross-national comparisons of higher education learning outcomes are scientifically possible and whether their implementation is feasible
- **Not a pilot!**
Proof of concept AND practicality
Designed to assist countries decide by the end of 2010 whether to pursue the AHELO initiative towards a full-scale pilot
- **OECD role**
Establish broad frameworks that guide international expert committees charged with instrument development in the assessment areas
- **Timeframe 2008-2010**
- **Further steps to be determined on the basis of outcomes**



The AHELO feasibility study

- **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
- **Several strands of work carried out in parallel**
Reflecting several aspects of quality
- **Number of countries and HEIs deliberately limited**
For each strand, implementation in 10 HEIs in each of 3-6 countries across multiple languages and cultures



The AHELO feasibility study

4 strands of work
Carried out independently but coherently

1. **Generic skills strand**
International pilot test of the US Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)
 - To assess the extent to which higher-order skills of the type measured by the CLA can be validly measured across different cultural, linguistic and institutional contexts
2. **Discipline strand**
2 sub-strands on Engineering and Economics
Instruments yet to be determined
 - Possible candidates: Provaso (Brazil), EGEL (Mexico), GRE Major Fields Test (US), ABET (Engineering, US) etc.
 - Approach (implementation of a full instrument of combination of item pools from distinct instruments) to be determined by experts



The AHELO feasibility study

4 strands of work

Carried out independently but coherently

3. "Value-added" or "Learning gain" measurement strand

Exploring the issue of value-added measurement from several perspectives

- Conceptually
- Examination and analysis of existing data sources, methodologies and psychometric evidence
- Building on recent OECD work at school level:
"Measuring improvements in learning outcomes – best practices to assess the value-added of schools" (forthcoming Oct. 2008)



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4 strands of work

1. Generic skills strand
2. Discipline strand
3. Value added measurement strand
4. Contextual strand

Piloting of instruments involved

Development of contextual information indicators at institutional level

- Of the kind developed by the CHE in Germany
- Already successfully applied across borders in Europe
- Allows looking beyond the sole student performance: institutional missions, graduates' satisfaction, employment and socio-economic outcomes etc.



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For each strand involving a pilot

- 3-4 countries and 10 HEIs per country
- Seeking to ensure diversity
 - Geographically
Ideally 1 Asia-Pacific, 2 Europe, 1 North America
 - Linguistically
Anglo-Saxon, Asian, Latin...
 - Culturally
Latin, Nordic, Eastern European, Asian...
 - In the types of HEIs
Universities vs vocationally-oriented HEIs, research-intensive vs teaching focus, elite...
- Proof of concept of international validity and reliability of instrument



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Current status

- Circulation of roadmap
- Set-up of institutional framework
- Invitation to countries to participate
Confirmed participating countries as of 5 Sept:
Australia, Belgium (Fl.), Finland, Italy, Korea, Netherlands, Sweden
+ several forthcoming
- Fundraising



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Next steps

- Allocation of participating countries to various strands
- Planning for field implementation in the various strands
- Securing funding
Countries and foundations
- Developing instruments for the different strands with international experts
Selection of instruments, translation, cultural adaptation, development of computer platform etc.
- Communication and discussion with relevant stakeholders and experts
University groups (e.g. European University Association), staff, business and student organisations, quality assurance agencies, educational testing organisations, experts and researchers



The AHELO feasibility study

Governance and management

- Education Policy Committee (24-25 April 2008)
OECD member countries and observers
Strategic direction for EDU work
Political oversight on AHELO (decision beyond feasibility study phase)
- Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) Governing Board (16 April 2008)
Institutions, agencies, governments
Responsible for managing the AHELO feasibility study → joint steering
- Group of National Experts of those directly involved and expert groups working on various strands



Summary: Why this initiative?

- **Information feeding peer pressure and public accountability has become more powerful than legislation and regulation...**
... makes international comparisons inevitable in a field hitherto primarily of national interest
- **The cost of action is significant...**
Major challenges to be overcome
... **but so is the cost of inaction**
Judgements about tertiary education outcomes will continue to be made on the basis of rankings derived from inputs or research-driven outputs
- **Not a ranking, nor standardisation, but evidence for policy and practice**



Summary: Challenges

- **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 tertiary 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
- **Addressing political challenges...**
... on a controversial issue



Thank you

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