



OECD

AHELO

ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION
LEARNING OUTCOMES

Higher Education
Assessment
Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes
Students
Learning
Outcomes



Preface

Tomorrow's workforce is key in sustaining the wealth and development of nations and their people. In this changing global economy, high quality tertiary education is essential and students need to obtain the right skills to ensure economic, scientific and social progress. More students than ever are enrolled in higher education – a sector in which both governments and individuals invest significant resources. The OECD's initiative to assess the feasibility of an Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) will maintain a clear focus on teaching and learning and will identify a wide range of factors influencing higher education. On average, a student's tertiary education costs USD 67 000 (including both public and private costs). In some countries, such as Austria, Germany and the United States, these costs exceed USD 100 000. How can we know that this money is spent well? Tools are needed to measure students' knowledge and whether they are equipped, at the end of their tertiary education, with the skills needed for the emerging job market.

Barbara Ischinger



Barbara Ischinger
Director for Education

In 2008, discussions among OECD Education Ministers at their meeting in Tokyo focused on the evaluation of the quality of higher education. After three consultations with international experts, the AHELO initiative was launched to provide answers.

For more than 40 years, the OECD has been one of the largest and most reliable sources of comparable statistics as well as economic and social data.

The Directorate for Education has ample experience in this area with projects such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) testing the knowledge and skills of 15 year olds and the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).



AHELO at a Glance

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- What?** A test of university students comparable internationally
 - Why?** No international tools exist for the direct evaluation of students
 - Who?** The OECD, an international consortium of experts and 15 countries from all over the world
 - How?** An evaluation of generic skills and discipline-specific skills (engineering and economics)
 - Results** Anonymous comparable data at the level of institution. If the feasibility study is a success countries will consider a full-scale assessment.
 - When?** The feasibility study: Tests administered 2011-2012
Results and final conference end 2012

What will AHELO achieve?

The project will test students nearing the end of their bachelor degree. The tests will be created so that results can be comparable internationally regardless of language or cultural background. The tests will provide actual data on the quality of learning and its relevance to the labour market.

The OECD will be working with a consortium of world experts and teams in 15 participating countries to develop and administer the tests. By the end of the feasibility study, in 2012, we will determine if such tests can indeed be developed and successfully administered to students.



Lisa F. Young - Fotolia.com

What is being tested?

The assessment will look both at the skills that students in all fields should be acquiring (the Generic Skills) and skills that are specific to each discipline (with a focus on engineering and economics for the feasibility study).

Generic Skills

The test questions will be based on an international adaptation of the US Collegiate Learning Assessment (developed by the Council for Aid to Education). Students taking this test will need to use critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving and written communication to answer several open-ended questions about a hypothetical but realistic situation and gather the necessary evidence from different sources (letters, maps, memos, etc.).

Discipline-Specific Skills

In the case of engineering and economics, the focus of the test will be on the capacity of students to extrapolate from what they have learned and apply their competencies in new contexts.



For the purpose of the feasibility study each of these three tests will be developed and administered in three small groups of countries (see diagram).



Along with each of these tests **contextual questionnaires** will be administered to link the test results with information on universities and students. The conclusions from the Contextual Dimension expert group on the areas to be included in these questionnaires are available at www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo.

No one is surprised by top universities that attract A+ students and turn out A+ graduates. But what about universities that accept B+ students and produce A+ graduates? Which is doing the better job? If the feasibility study is successful, at a later stage the project will also try to determine the university's "**value added**".

Who is involved in the feasibility study?

- **Fifteen countries** comprising a range of languages and cultures: Australia, Belgium, Colombia (tbc), Egypt, Finland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States (10 institutions in each country).
- **International experts:**
 - a consortium led by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)
 - the Council for Aid to Education (CAE)
- Representatives of the **higher education sector**: AHELO is an open and transparent initiative. The OECD has invited a group of organisations with a stake or interest in higher education to join the AHELO Stakeholders Consultative Group. Members of this group include, among others, international associations of quality assurance agencies, students or universities. For a complete list of the organisations involved please see www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo.
- **Sponsors**: The feasibility study has been financed by the participating countries and through generous contributions from Lumina Foundation for Education (United States), Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Portugal), Riksbankens Jubileumsfund (Sweden), the Spencer Foundation (United States) as well as the Higher Education Founding Council (HEFCE – England) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA - Ireland).

Timing and next steps

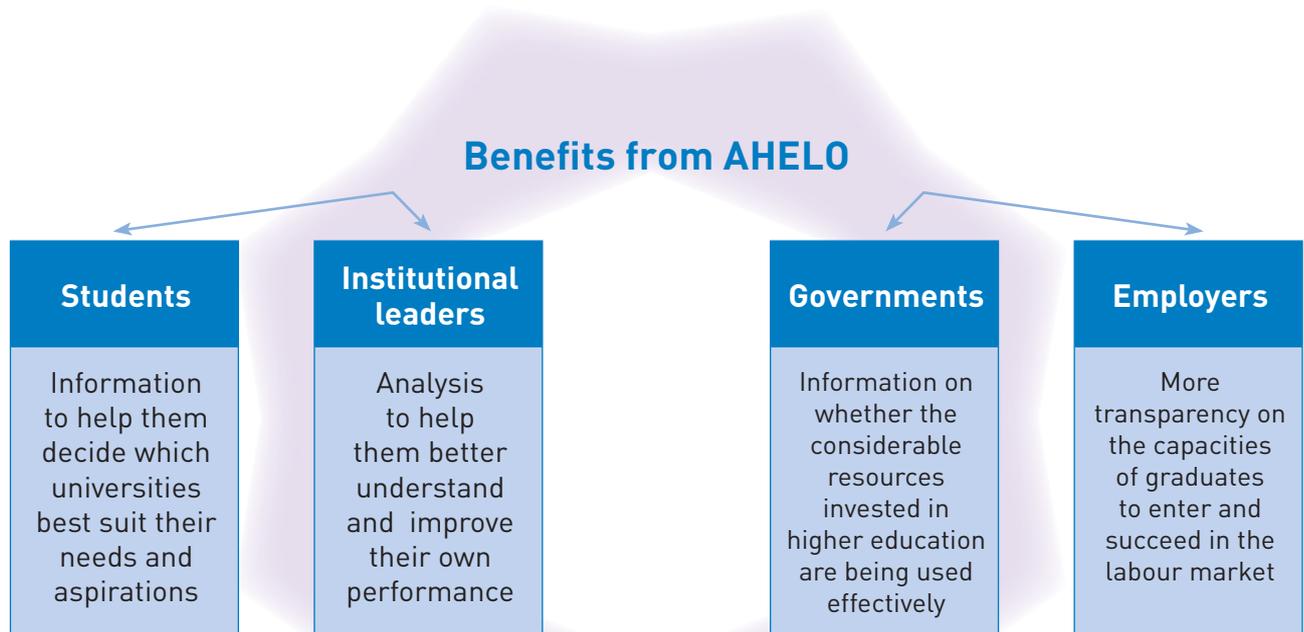
The first phase of the work (January 2010 – June 2011) currently under way will see the **development of testing instruments** for the generic and discipline-specific skills in economics and engineering and their validation with a small number of students.

In the second phase (July 2011 – December 2012) **these tests (and the contextual questionnaires) will be administered to students and faculty in selected higher education institutions** in participating countries.

A **final conference** will be organised at the **end of 2012** to review the findings of the AHELO feasibility study: whether an international assessment of higher education learning outcomes is scientifically and practically possible. Based on these conclusions, OECD member countries will decide whether to launch a full-scale AHELO.



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What is IMHE and how to join?

The OECD Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) is a membership organisation within the OECD Directorate for Education. It brings together institutions of higher education as well as government departments, agencies and other non-profit organisations, to discuss and debate issues within higher education management. To find out more and to submit your online application, please visit the IMHE website at: www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/join.

More on the work of OECD on Education
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The Directorate for Education

8 main themes



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