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# DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNING BOARD

Group of National Experts on the AHELO Feasibility Study

AHELO STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATIVE GROUP: PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE

27-28 April 2009 OECD Conference Centre, 2 rue André-Pascal, 75016 Paris

The GNE is invited to:

- COMMENT and AGREE on the proposed Terms of Reference for the Stakeholders Consultative Group; and
- DELINEATE the realms of possible activities for that group.

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# AHELO STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATIVE GROUP: PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE

#### Introduction

1. This document sets out proposed Terms of Reference for the Stakeholders Consultative Group (SCG). It was circulated to the SCG for feedback and discussion during its first meeting on 4 February 2009.

## Background setting and rationale for a Stakeholders' Consultative Group

- 2. AHELO emerged from the meeting of OECD Education ministers that took place in Athens (2006) where the OECD was asked to help countries move from quantitative expansion of higher education to the enhancement of its quality and relevance.
- 3. The value of establishing a forum for discussion and interaction between the AHELO steering bodies (the IMHE Governing Board and now the GNE) and the various stakeholders with an interest in AHELO emerged fairly early in the initial stages of discussion on a strategy for an international assessment of higher education learning outcomes. Indeed, press statements and preliminary discussions held with some stakeholders revealed a number of misunderstandings, over-expectations and even fears to some extent about the OECD initiative:
  - Persistent confusion in the press that the OECD is preparing/launching a new ranking of HEIs;
  - Expectations by some groups/stakeholders that AHELO would ultimately provide a comprehensive and exhaustive picture of higher education quality worldwide;
  - Concerns by some groups/stakeholders that AHELO results could eventually be tied to quality
    assurance external evaluations and/or funding allocation decisions and hence, would lead to some
    degree of uniformity.
- 4. At its November 2008 meeting, the IMHE Governing Board emphasized the *importance of timely and transparent consultation [of stakeholders] in order to secure buy-in and support from the sector.* As a result, both the IMHE Governing Board and the GNE strongly emphasized the set-up of an informal Stakeholders' Consultative Group gathering the diversity of stakeholders with an interest in higher education quality in order to:
  - Streamline communication on the goals and progress of the AHELO feasibility study;
  - Listen to stakeholders' suggestions, concerns, warnings or advices on the AHELO feasibility study goals and progress;
  - Provide a forum for multilateral discussion and cross-fertilization of ideas on this important initiative; and
  - Rely on influential networks to disseminate the aims, methods and progress of the AHELO feasibility study (see Annex 1 for an illustration).

# **Steering of the project**

- 5. The IMHE Governing Board is responsible for the broader management of the AHELO feasibility study while the strategic policy decision of whether to take this work forward beyond the feasibility study stage lies with the Education Policy Committee.
- 6. The Group of National Experts (GNE) on the AHELO feasibility study is a subsidiary body of the IMHE Governing Board and is responsible for guiding work on the AHELO feasibility study. The AHELO GNE's responsibilities include technical and operational decisions regarding the conduct of the AHELO feasibility study. The AHELO GNE reports to the IMHE Governing Board and to the Education Policy Committee.
- 7. The Stakeholders Consultative Group for the AHELO feasibility study was set up and its role was defined on the first meeting of the AHELO GNE (17-18 December 2009). In this meeting, the AHELO GNE:
  - Took note of the establishment of a Stakeholders' Consultative Group;
  - Emphasized the need to balance the desirability of open and transparent communication with stakeholders with the timely and efficient completion of the AHELO feasibility study; and
  - Recommended that the Stakeholders' Consultative Group should be chaired by the Chair of the AHELO GNE and/or the Chair of the IMHE Governing Board.
- 8. The SCG shall not make decisions but shall provide inputs and give insights to the GNE as a consultative body. The contribution of the SCG hence shall focus on the technical and communication matters of the AHELO feasibility study.

#### Roles of the Stakeholders' Consultative Group on AHELO

- 9. As proposed by the AHELO GNE, the SCG has two main roles:
  - It is a channel through which information about AHELO can be presented to, and discussed with, some of the principal stakeholders in higher education; and
  - It is a forum where those stakeholders can expose and formulate ideas about how the study can be implemented. Indeed, some of the stakeholders cope with similar difficulties in adopting a learning outcomes approach while undertaking ever more cross-national activities.

#### Composition of the SCG

- 10. It is impractical and unnecessary for the SCG to be a fully representative group bringing together all interested parties. The composition of the SCG shall remain open to any interested organization, provided diversity is ensured. However the size of the group shall also remain manageable and priority has thus been given to the extent possible to meta-organisations and federations rather than national organisations.
- 11. The composition of the SCG is not fixed and remains open to experts or organizations that represent a voice of the stakeholders. Annex 2 provides a list of organisations that have accepted to join the AHELO SCG to date.

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12. The decision to include additional members belongs to the GNE, through suggestions to the OECD Secretariat and approval of applications from new organizations by the AHELO GNE Bureau.

## Chairing of the SCG

13. The SCG shall be chaired and/or co-chaired by the Chair of the GNE – Mr Jan Levy - and/or the Chair of the IMHE Governing Board – Ms Marijk van der Wende as per the GNE recommendation.

#### **Functioning of the SCG**

- 14. As this group is primarily a platform for discussion meant to reflect a variety of positions, including contradictory viewpoints, reaching consensus is not necessary.
- 15. The involvement of each participant shall depend on his/her will, capacity and possibility. All will however be given the opportunity to express their views.

# Responsibilities regarding the SCG

- 16. Through the diverse range of backgrounds and expertises of its different constituencies, the SCG has the potential to bring valuable knowledge and input to some aspects of the AHELO feasibility study e.g. in reflecting on its potential impact and ways to address possible undesired effects (the IMHE Governing Board agreed in April 2008 to include a question about the impact of the assessment in the feasibility study, i.e. the internal and external driving forces). The scope of the SCG involvement and contribution shall however be delineated more clearly. The GNE is responsible for identifying the kind of possible activities to envisage with the stakeholders.
- 17. At the same time, the stakeholders have a strong interest in the AHELO feasibility study and might have special requests during its unfolding (e.g. to be informed or consulted on specific issues) or request more specific information to update their membership. They may also inquire about the intermediate outputs or final results of the AHELO feasibility study. The GNE is responsible for establishing rules on the disclosure and sharing of AHELO documents with the SCG, and the use of the AHELO feasibility study data.
- 18. The GNE is invited to:
  - COMMENT and AGREE on the proposed Terms of Reference for the Stakeholders Consultative Group; and
  - DELINEATE the realms of possible activities for that group.

# ANNEX 1 - ILLUSTRATION OF THE POTENTIAL DISSEMINATION ROLE OF THE SCG: THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION (INQAAHE) BIENNIAL CONFERENCE (30.03 – 02.04.2009)

- 19. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) held its 10<sup>th</sup> biennial conference: "New approaches to quality Assurance in the changing world of Higher Education", in Abu Dhabi. Around 400 participants, mainly from quality assurance agencies and institutional networks from all over the world, participated in the meeting.
- 20. INQAAHE is a member of the AHELO Stakeholders' Consultative Group, as well as the Asia Pacific Quality Network and the European stakeholders of the Bologna Process; and many of their members attended the conference. The audience also included representatives from networks of Quality Assurance Agencies and branches of INQAAHE like the Arabic network for QA and the Ibero-American network.
- 21. The heads of QA networks many of whom came from non-OECD economies who attended the presentation of the AHELO feasibility study expressed a willingness to communicate with their membership on the progress of AHELO.
- 22. The main questions and comments following the presentation of the AHELO feasibility study are featured below:
  - The crucial impact of the contextual factors on the quality of learning outcomes. Participants welcomed the objective of the feasibility study to consider carefully the impact of the contextual factors on the education trajectory and on the ultimate results of the students.
  - If the AHELO feasibility concluded that assessing internationally was impossible this result would question the credibility of the existing evaluating methods and would impair the functioning of the quality assurance systems and, by association, of higher education. For that reason, QA agencies appreciated the transparency demonstrated by the AHELO team.
  - TUNING reassured the audience because this 'bottom-up' approach stemmed from academia. TUNING is now expanding into the US and the report recently released by Cliff Adelman on the Bologna process has already been circulated in the sector and has raised new thoughts. US accreditors are paying close attention to the European approach.
  - The attendees recognised the stratification of the study into strands of work was necessary for methodological reasons, although they insisted that it was vital that the strands coordinated with each other, and on the importance of exploring the interplay between them: some explained that QA agencies are being increasingly criticised for overlooking the systemic vision. The credibility of the AHELO feasibility study lay instead in the capture of the entire functioning of the educational transformative process within the institutions.
- 23. Some asked about whom would interpret the results of the tests. Getting figures seemed less important than understanding their meaning. Some suggested that the stakeholders could play an active role here.

# ANNEX 2 – LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS (AS OF 27 APRIL 2009)

- AAC&U: American Association of Colleges and Universities
- ACE: American Council on Education
- APQN: Asia-Pacific Quality Network
- BIAC: Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD
- CHEA: Council for Higher Education Accreditation (USA)
- EI: Education International
- ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- EURASHE: European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
- EUA: European University Association
- ESU: European Students' Union
- IAU: International Association of Universities
- INQAAHE: International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
- TUAC: Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD
- SEFI: European Society for Engineering Education
- CEEMET: Council of the European Employers of the Metal, Engineering and Technology-based industries
- EEA: European Economic Association