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DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNING BOARD

**Group of National Experts on the AHELO Feasibility Study**

**AHELO FEASIBILITY STUDY PROGRESS REPORT (ABRIDGED)**

AHELO GNE, Paris, 28-29 March 2011  
IMHE GB, Paris, 4 April 2011  
EDPC, Paris, 7-8 April 2011

*The AHELO GNE discussed this document at their March 2011 meeting and agreed to declassify it in this current version.*

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## **FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES (AHELO): PROGRESS REPORT**

1. The purpose of this document is to update participants of the Education Policy Committee (EDPC), the IMHE Governing Board (GB) and the AHELO Group of National Experts (GNE) with progress on the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) feasibility study. This report covers progress since the last meeting of the AHELO GNE which was held on 25-26 October 2010 in Paris. This document takes account of developments up to 7 March 2011.
2. The EDPC and IMHE GB are invited to:
  - TAKE NOTE of this progress report.
3. The AHELO GNE is invited to:
  - TAKE NOTE of this progress report; and
  - REPORT on progress as necessary.

### **Project summary**

4. The purpose of the feasibility study is to gauge whether an AHELO is scientifically and practically feasible. It is not to develop a comprehensive or final assessment. Rather, it is proposed to take advantage of the feasibility study to explore different approaches, methodologies and instruments that might eventually be envisaged as parts of a fully-fledged assessment. As a result, the work is divided into three distinct strands of work to be undertaken separately but coherently.
5. The AHELO feasibility study is undertaking three small-scale pilots of instruments to assess generic skills and discipline-specific assessments in two disciplines (engineering and economics have been chosen for the feasibility study). Each international small-scale pilot is expected to involve about 10 HEIs from 4-5 countries representing a breadth of languages, cultures and geographic backgrounds, to assess the international validity and reliability of the instruments used. As part of each of these assessments, contextual data, as well as indirect proxies of quality, will be collected to add essential analytic dimensions to AHELO and to underline the potential danger of conducting an outcomes assessment without taking account of systemic, institutional and individual characteristics.
6. In addition to these assessment pilots and the contextual dimension embedded into them, another strand of work is envisaged in the future to explore the issue of value-added measurement in higher education – *i.e.* the learning gain that takes place during the higher education experience irrespective of previous abilities. This question would be addressed by researchers, both from a conceptual perspective and through a psychometric analysis of existing datasets. This reflection would provide input for the longer term development of an AHELO, should the feasibility study demonstrate the scientific and practical viability of such an endeavour. Its realization is however deferred subject to funding becoming available.
7. In accordance with the decisions of the 4<sup>th</sup> GNE meeting, the work will develop in several phases:

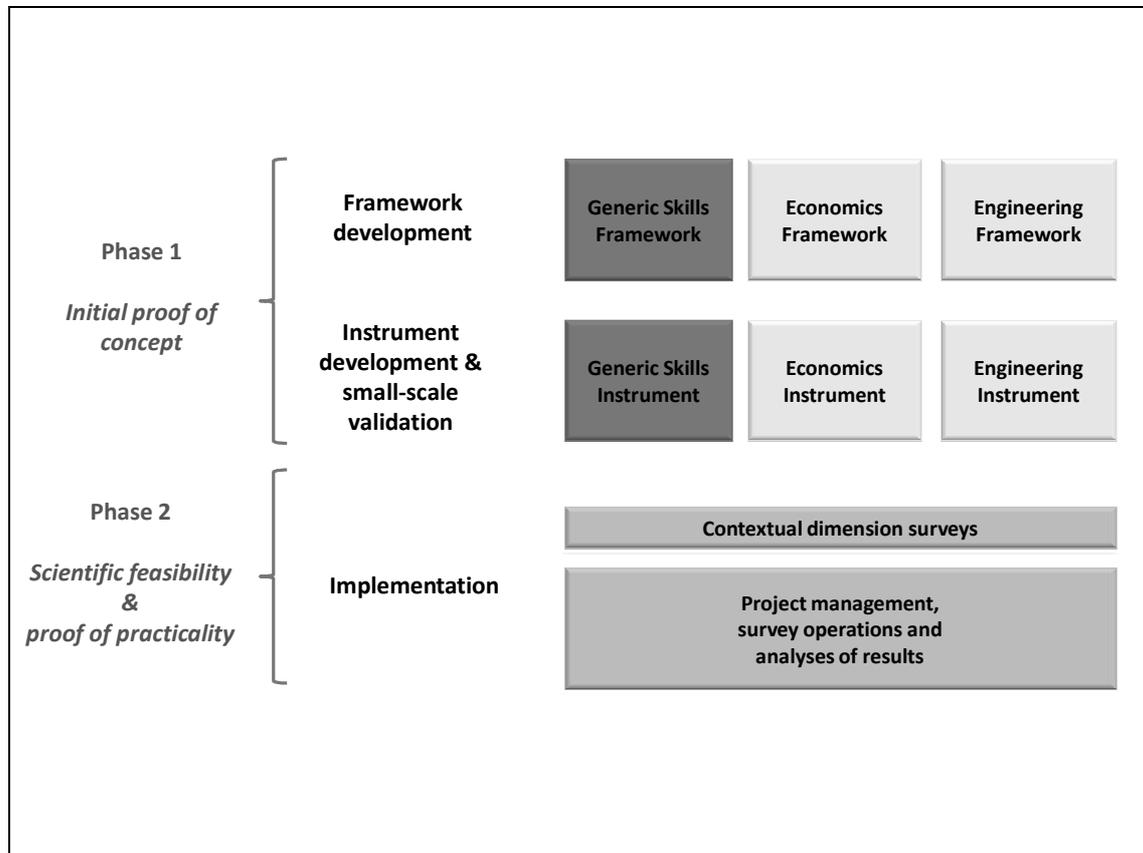
- Phase 1 – January 2010 to April 2011

The first phase of the work consists in the development of provisional assessment frameworks and testing instruments suitable for an international context for each strand of work (generic skills, economics and engineering), and their small-scale validation (cognitive labs and think aloud interviews with small groups of students in a convenience sample) to get a sense of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural validity.

- Phase 2 – March 2011 to December 2012 (subject to funding availability)

In a second phase, the practical aspects of assessing students learning outcomes will be under focus, and the implementation of the three assessment instruments in a small group of diverse higher education institutions will help explore the best ways to implicate, involve and motivate leaders, faculty and students to take part into the testing. Each international pilot is expected to involve about 10 HEIs from 4-5 countries representing a breadth of languages, cultures and geographic backgrounds, to assess the international validity and reliability of the instruments used. A contextual dimension is embedded in the implementation of each of the three assessments to make some preliminary explorations of the relationships between context and learning outcomes, and the factors leading to enhanced outcomes.

**Figure 1. AHELO Phases 1 and 2**



8. Should these three assessment instruments demonstrate the feasibility of assessing student learning outcomes across different countries and institutions, the last phase will be to develop a value-added measurement strand to explore methodologies and approaches to capture value-added or the contribution of higher education institutions to students' outcomes, irrespective of students' incoming abilities.

9. By the completion of the feasibility study in late 2012, the information collected on student performance and the analysis of the results will help assess whether a full-fledged AHELO study could feasibly be taken forward from both scientific and practical standpoints. The outcomes of the AHELO feasibility study will guide the decision to be made by the OECD member countries of whether to launch a full-fledged study in the longer term.

## **Status report**

### ***Fifth meeting of the AHELO Group of National Experts***

10. The AHELO GNE met on 25 and 26 October 2010 to:

- Review progress on the various aspects of the AHELO feasibility study.
- Agree how to take forward the work of the feasibility study.
- Initiate reflections on AHELO beyond the feasibility study.

11. With respect to the development work for the Generic Skills Strand, Mr. Bob Keeley and Mr. Roger Benjamin (Council for Aid to Education - CAE) reported on work progress with this strand [[EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE\(2010\)14](#)]. The GNE welcomed the progress achieved in this strand.

12. With regards to the development work for the other strands of work, the ACER Consortium, represented by Mr. Hamish Coates, presented the progress report on project management [[EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE\(2010\)16](#)], the assessment design [[EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE\(2010\)17](#)] and analysis plan [[EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE\(2010\)18](#)] and the terms of reference and proposed membership of the Technical Advisory Group [[EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE\(2010\)19](#)]. The GNE took note of the ACER plans and documents.

13. The summary record of this meeting and detailed decisions made is available on Odis [[EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE/M\(2010\)2/REV1](#)].

### ***Upcoming meetings***

14. The sixth meeting of the AHELO Group of National Experts is scheduled for 28-29 March 2011 to review progress on the various parts of the AHELO feasibility study work and initiate the reflection on the feasibility study initial findings and longer term plans. This meeting will be followed by a meeting of National Project Managers (29-30 March 2011) and the Stakeholders Consultative Group (31 March 2011) at the OECD Conference Centre, and a Technical Advisory Group meeting on 5-7 April 2011 in Tokyo.

### ***Country participation***

15. Since the 5<sup>th</sup> GNE meeting, the Slovak Republic has joined the group of participating countries in all three strands of work. The participation of Colombia in the generic skills and engineering strands has also been confirmed. Mexico has also confirmed its participation in a third strand (engineering). Therefore, as of 7 March 2011, 16 countries have signed up to participate in the AHELO feasibility study: Australia,

Belgium (Fl.), Colombia, Egypt, Finland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, the Russian Federation, the Slovak Republic, Sweden and the United States (through the involvement of institutions in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Missouri and Pennsylvania) (see Annex 1 for country-specific strand of work).

16. The Secretariat actively followed up with countries which had, at one time or another, expressed an interest in participation and provided detailed briefings to new requests

17. Saudi Arabia has signalled a strong interest in joining the AHELO feasibility study but only as an observer at this stage. As all non-OECD countries participating in AHELO are full participants so far, the modalities for this participation are currently being examined for discussion with the AHELO GNE [EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE(2011)11].

### ***Progress on substantive work***

#### *Generic Skills strand*

##### Translation and adaptation of two performance tasks

18. The two final performance tasks (PTs) have been translated and adapted for the original group of participating countries. These countries have conducted cognitive labs to pilot test the translated/adapted versions of the two performance tasks with a small number of students under CAE's guidance. Several issues are worth noting on this process. First the initial adaptation of the PTs which was needed was minimal (names, city/government structures, date format). The translation process went smoothly and brought some adaptation issues to light. The PTs functioned as anticipated in the cognitive workshops and can be considered valid, with slight modifications to help with understanding. Some issues for longer term work were identified through the cognitive workshop process. The PT concept was not as familiar in some countries: there may be a need to provide students with an example (mini-PT and answer) ahead of the test. Also, the perceived confidence in the sources of information may also differ according to different national contexts. Further insights will probably come from the additional three countries participating in this strand.

##### Work on pre-implementation

19. CAE is finalizing draft work plans for overseeing proctor training, supporting NPMs, managing scoring of performance tasks, and managing data output. The internet platform documents for the student, proctor, and scorer interfaces have been translated and revised by an external translation company for the original cohort of the Generic Skills strand participating countries (Finland, Korea, Kuwait, Mexico, and Norway). CAE and country teams will go through a round of User Acceptance Testing to ensure correct display of text and verify functionality, once those documents are fully uploaded to the internet platform. The English version of the AHELO proctor reference manual, as well as the proctor training video, have been sent to an external translation company to produce an initial translation. And finally, CAE is in the process of designing the results report information for the OECD, country-level results, and individual higher education institution level results.

20. A detailed progress report for the Generic Skills strand will be presented at the sixth GNE meeting [EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE(2011)3].

#### *Economics and Engineering framework and instrument development*

21. The draft working version of the Economics and Engineering frameworks have been shared with participating countries and will be finalised by the Consortium and the Expert Groups for delivery in 2011. The development of the assessment instruments is well underway: the translation and cultural adaptation

are currently being undertaken in participating countries, and focus groups are being conducted to provide validation with a small number of students. National Project Managers (NPMs) in participating countries attended web-based training sessions for the translation and cultural adaptation of the instruments, and for the conduct of focus groups.

22. Detailed progress reports for the Economics and Engineering strands will be presented at the sixth GNE meeting [[EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE\(2011\)4](#) and [EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE\(2011\)5](#)].

#### *Contextual questionnaires*

23. Following the decision at the last GNE meeting to pursue work with the Contextual Dimension (Module D), the Secretariat negotiated with the ACER Consortium a contract to develop contextual questionnaires for inclusion in the feasibility study.

24. Three questionnaires will be developed, each with a response time of ten minutes:

- A **student questionnaire** looking at their demographic profile (age, gender, disadvantaged groups or socio-economic status, etc.) and at the teaching and learning practices (perceptions of academic challenge, clear sense of direction, quality of effort, student-faculty relationship, etc.).
- A **faculty questionnaire** on curricular design and pedagogy philosophies (curriculum reforms integrating application and problem solving skills, expectations for teaching practices, etc.) as well as alternative instructional settings (workplace placements or internships, simulations or problem-based learning, etc.).
- An **institution questionnaire** gathering information on institution characteristics (size, curriculum structure, facilities, financial resources, teaching staff, student body, etc.) and institution type (research emphasis, incentives for teaching, teaching/assessment culture, emphasis on generic outcomes, etc.).

25. The development of these questionnaires will be the main focus of the upcoming TAG meeting scheduled on 5-7 April 2011. A consultation with members of the SCG will also take place as part of the meeting scheduled on 31 April 2011.

26. A progress report on the contextual dimension and the development of the draft framework will be presented at the sixth GNE meeting [[EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE\(2011\)6](#)].

#### *Longer term plans*

27. The OECD Secretariat has prepared an options paper in order to initiate initial reflection on AHELO longer term plans beyond the AHELO feasibility study. This paper will be discussed with the AHELO GNE at its sixth meeting [[EDU/IMHE/AHELO/GNE\(2011\)10](#)].

#### *Communication and dissemination activities*

28. The AHELO Newsletter was sent in December 2010 to subscribers and potential sponsors. The detailed project update was also revised at that time. A new AHELO Newsletter and a revised version of the detailed project update will be prepared in April 2011.

29. The Tuning-AHELO reports on expected/desired learning outcomes in Economics and Engineering have been published as part of the OECD EDU Working Papers series. These are available free of charge on the OECD iLibrary ([Economics](#), [Engineering](#)).

30. Since the 5<sup>th</sup> GNE meeting, dissemination about AHELO has been pursued through participation of the OECD Secretariat in two events:

- FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) Summit 2010 on higher education, 11-12 November 2010, New Delhi.
- Knowledge Network Institute of Thailand, 15 November 2010, Bangkok.
- Seminar organised by QS (Quaquarelli Symonds) on university ranking, 16-17 November 2011, Singapore.
- Université Laval, Meeting of the Comité de Valorisation de l'Enseignement, 26 November 2010 Québec.
- Higher School of Economics, University Seminar *Research & Development Education* 14 December 2010 Moscow.
- U-Multirank advisory group, 15 February 2011, Brussels.
- *Modelling and Measurement of Competencies in Higher Education* Conference organised by the German Ministry of Education, 24-25 February 2011, Berlin.
- Board meeting of the Strategic Council of the University of Geneva, 8 March 2011.

31. Presentations on AHELO were also made to the following two groups visiting the OECD:

- Norwegian Fagerberg committee on 5 November 2010.
- Finnish University Chancellors on 8 March 2011.

32. In order to reach academics audiences, an article describing the AHELO feasibility study was published in the Intellectual Economics Journal (Issue 2010, No.2(8), p. 39-46, available at [www.mruni.eu/en/mokslo\\_darbai/ie/paskutinis\\_numeris/](http://www.mruni.eu/en/mokslo_darbai/ie/paskutinis_numeris/)).

## ANNEX I - AHELO COUNTRY-SPECIFIC STRAND OF WORK

<b>AHELO Strand of Work</b>	<b>Participating Countries</b>
Generic Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colombia</li> <li>• Egypt</li> <li>• Finland</li> <li>• Korea</li> <li>• Kuwait</li> <li>• Mexico</li> <li>• Norway</li> <li>• Slovak Republic</li> <li>• USA (CT, MA, MO and PA)</li> </ul>
Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belgium (Fl.)</li> <li>• Egypt</li> <li>• Italy</li> <li>• Mexico</li> <li>• Netherlands</li> <li>• Russian Federation</li> <li>• Slovak Republic</li> </ul>
Engineering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australia</li> <li>• Colombia</li> <li>• Egypt</li> <li>• Japan</li> <li>• Mexico</li> <li>• Slovak Republic</li> <li>• Sweden</li> </ul>

<b>AHELO Participating Countries</b>	<b>Strands of Work Selected by Counties</b>
1. Australia	Engineering
2. Belgium (Fl.)	Economics
3. Colombia	Generic Skills, Engineering
4. Egypt	Generic Skills, Economics, Engineering
5. Finland	Generic Skills
6. Italy	Economics
7. Japan	Engineering
8. Korea	Generic Skills
9. Kuwait	Generic Skills
10. Mexico	Generic Skills, Economics, Engineering
11. Netherlands	Economics
12. Norway	Generic Skills
13. Russian Federation	Economics
14. Sweden	Engineering
15. Slovak Republic	Generic Skills, Economics, Engineering
16. USA (CT, MA, MO and PA)	Generic Skills