

What is new with AHELO?

(click on title to access directly)

- ➔ More countries participating
- ➔ Strong progress with instrument development
- ➔ Work starting with the contextual dimension
- ➔ What the experts involved say about AHELO
- ➔ Next steps and timeline

Background on AHELO and the Feasibility Study

The AHELO project aims to directly measure, at the international level, what undergraduate degree students know and can do upon graduation.

The idea is to provide better information on teaching and learning quality than is currently available to higher education institutions, governments, and other stakeholders including students and employers.

As a first phase, the OECD launched a feasibility study to explore the following:

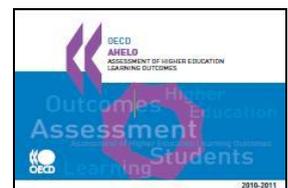
- Is it scientifically feasible to devise a set of **instruments** applicable across a range of different institutions, cultures and languages?
- Is practical **implementation** possible? Will students and institutions participate in the study?

The feasibility study has undertaken work in three strands focusing on: generic skills, economics and engineering.

Discipline, higher education and assessment experts from 15 countries have worked together this year to make steady progress on the study. Progress is occurring at a rapid pace and significant momentum has been achieved across all strands, with enormous interest and goodwill among both academic experts and countries, including those which are not participating directly in the study.

[ahelo brochure](#)

(click on the image to open)



[Who's who](#)

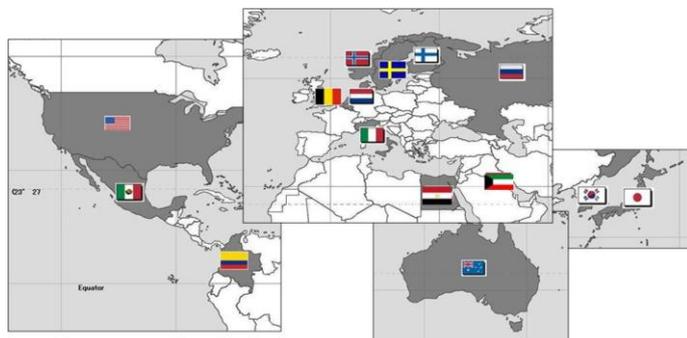
click [here](#) to find out more on project governance and the various groups involved

New countries participating

Egypt is the latest country to join the project and will participate in all three strands of work.

There are now fifteen countries participating in the feasibility study. Together, they reflect a wide range of languages and cultures which will help test the cross-cultural validity of the assessments.

New countries can still join this stage of the project until end December.



Click [here](#) for more on participating countries

Strong progress with instrument development

The participating countries, the OECD and the international experts have been working together on the development of frameworks and instruments for the assessment.

In the **Generic Skills strand**, the Council for Aid to Education has been contracted for the international adaptation of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) instrument, a 90-minute performance-based assessment. This portion of the study is well on its way to proving that an international tool to measure generic skills can indeed be developed. Two test items, chosen by participating countries, and their supporting materials are currently being translated and culturally adapted into five different languages. The lessons learnt about adaptation and validation through this process are already proving valuable, and will be documented.

For the **discipline-specific strands** (in engineering and economics), the ACER-led consortium convened meetings of the two international expert groups at the end of October in order to develop the provisional frameworks and discuss actual test items

- **Economics:** The Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, New Jersey has made steady progress in developing an economics instrument that tests the skills and knowledge of final-year bachelor's degree students.

Building on initial preparatory work to develop an assessment framework for economics, the AHELO's Economics Expert Group met in Paris from 29 to 31 October. After three days of in-depth discussion, the Expert Group reached agreement on a draft economics framework, based on the 'Tuning-AHELO Conceptual Framework of Expected and Desired Learning Outcomes in Economics' and the United Kingdom 'QAA subject Benchmark Statement for Economics 2007'. At the same time, the Economics Expert Group reviewed draft test items, which were then mapped against the framework. The items comprised 90 multiple choice question items and constructed response items developed to provide additional coverage.

The framework and items are being revised in preparation for adaptation, translation and qualitative validation in 2011.

- **Engineering:** The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has been working since mid-2010, with colleagues from Japan's National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER) and the University of Florence in Italy, to develop a framework and test for the field of engineering.

AHELO's Engineering Expert Group met in Singapore on 22 and 23 October to review progress and provide input for the framework's development. During the focused and productive two-day meeting the Engineering Expert Group approved the draft engineering framework based on the Tuning AHELO document.

Experts also reviewed 12 draft test units, each of which was developed around a key engineering problem and included a range of multiple choice and constructed response items. The best four items were selected and revisions recommended. The Expert Group also analysed a large set of items from the licensing exam for Japanese civil engineers and selected those most suitable to include in AHELO's engineering test.

ACER is working with partner organisations to refine and validate the items in preparation for adaptation, translation and qualitative validation in 2011.

In early 2011, work will begin on the translation of economics and engineering tests into the languages of participating countries. In order to ensure that instruments are valid, focus groups will be held with small numbers of students at a range of institutions across each country. Both students and faculty will be able to provide feedback on the instruments.

Click [here](#) for more background information on the instruments being developed

Work to begin on the contextual questionnaires:

Contractual negotiations have started with the ACER-led Consortium to develop the [contextual questionnaires](#). These questionnaires will be administered to students, faculty and institutions and will provide valuable information on contexts in which teaching and learning take place. This work will take into account the [conclusions](#) of the contextual expert group convened by the OECD in 2009 on the topics to be covered. This document been declassified and is available on our [website](#).

What the experts involved say about AHELO:

AHELO's **Technical Advisory Group** is chaired by **Dr Peter Ewell**, Vice President at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) in the USA. Peter believes the AHELO feasibility study is significant because it is the first time anyone has tried to compare tertiary outcomes internationally. Having been involved in the study of assessment and outcomes in the US for more than 25 years, Peter reflects that, while there is concern in the US and in other countries about tertiary attainment numbers among young adults, the focus tends to overlook the importance of quality.



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“It’s not enough to just have possessors of degrees, they have to be world-class degrees,” said Peter.

Peter suggests that the key to quality will soon be unlocked, as results from the AHELO feasibility study will allow institutions to benchmark themselves.

“If they see a similar institution achieving better outcomes they want to know ‘what are we doing differently and how can we do things like them?’,” said Peter. “Through AHELO we can start finding out what works.”

Peter believes the AHELO feasibility study has already achieved a great deal.

“You can see a real sign of enthusiasm and support for the project in the number of countries that have signed up to participate, despite the economic problems some are experiencing,” said Peter. “Just to have got this far at all is a good sign of progress.”



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AHELO's **Economics Expert Group** is chaired by **Cecilia A. Conrad**, Vice President and Dean of Pomona College in California, where she is also the Stedman-Sumner Professor of Economics. Having been involved in the development of assessment instruments on economics in the past, Cecilia feels that the AHELO feasibility study presents an immense opportunity for her as an educator.

Bringing educators from around the world together to discuss and identify commonalities is fantastic,” Cecilia said.

Cecilia is very happy with the framework for the economics assessment and its inclusion of different levels of understanding and Bloom’s taxonomy of learning domains. Given her interest in the challenge of designing international assessments, Cecilia is particularly happy that the Economics Expert Group was able to work out what questions would work across borders.

“With AHELO, we can learn what students need to gain a better understanding about so they will be able to compete with and work with graduates from other institutions around the world,” said Cecilia.

Cecilia believes the AHELO feasibility study offers the opportunity to provide institutions and faculty with the information they need to improve the ways in which students are taught.

The AHELO Feasibility Study **Engineering Expert Group** is chaired by **Robin King**. Currently Emeritus Professor of Engineering at the University of Technology, Sydney, and Executive Officer of the Australian Council of Engineering Deans, Robin has been involved in a number of other groups concerned with international education and quality assurance. Robin's professional interests include ensuring the mobility and quality of qualifications.



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“Measuring the outcomes of education is very difficult but it's really important,” said Robin.

In developing instruments for the assessment test in civil engineering, he stresses the need for instruments that can measure both technical knowledge and how graduating civil engineers look at problems.

“We need to measure their technical capability to solve them and their understanding of the broader impacts of civil engineering in society, such as the social and environmental impacts of locating a dam,” said Robin.

Despite the challenge of developing instruments which acknowledge the differing philosophies of engineering education around the world, and the need to ensure that all questions are appropriate to students in all countries, Robin is optimistic about the potential for the AHELO feasibility study. Most important of all, he suggests, is the fact that the study will raise awareness of educational quality.

Next steps

Experts around the world are engaged in developing instruments in both the economics and engineering strands of the AHELO Feasibility Study. Participating countries are preparing to conduct focus groups with students to revise the instruments.

There is significant interest from the academic and expert communities on the way in which the AHELO Feasibility Study progresses.

Meanwhile, the OECD continues raising funds in order to carry out field work with larger groups of students in each participating country (phase 2), hence building on the momentum already achieved and ensuring that the potential benefits are optimised.

Timeline for the completion of the feasibility study

- ➔ Full set of assessment instruments finalised by May 2011
- ➔ Contextual instruments finalised by August 2011
- ➔ Subject to available funding, implementation in participating institutions is scheduled to start end 2011 – beginning 2012.
- ➔ Final conference end 2012

Financing of the project – call for **sponsors** for phase 2

Find out what our current sponsors say about AHELO and why you should join them for phase 2 of the project: www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo/fundraising.

 Une version française de cette lettre d'information est disponible sur notre site web www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo-fr.