Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO): Update

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AHELO Feasibility Study

Purpose

Assess what students in higher education know and can do, across:
- Diverse cultures
- Different languages
- Different types of higher education institutions

Feasibility study designed to:
- Show what is possible and what might be possible
- Show what has worked well and what has not
- Provide lessons and stimulate reflection on how learning outcomes might be more effectively measured in future

Key features

Assess students:
- close to graduation of bachelor’s degree
- economics, engineering and generic skills
- multi-choice questions and constructed response tasks
- on-line

Collect information on student and institution context from students and faculty
AHELO Feasibility Study

Phase 1
Initial proof of concept

Phase 2
Scientific feasibility & proof of practicality

Frameworks
- Generic Skills Framework
- Economics Framework
- Engineering Framework

Instrument development & small-scale validation
- Generic Skills Instrument
- Economics Instrument
- Engineering Instrument

Implementation
- Contextual dimension surveys
- Project management, survey operations and analyses of results
AHELO Feasibility Study

Participation

17 countries, 25 field implementations
248 higher education institutions
23,000 students
4,800 faculty

Feasibility Study Report

Volume 1: Design and Implementation
Volume 2: Data Analysis and National Experiences

Conference: Measuring learning outcomes in Higher Education: Lessons learnt from the AHELO Feasibility Study and next steps
Volume 3: Further Insights
“The students reported that curiosity of their own achievements was their main motivation for taking part in AHELO”

Slovak Republic

“For the generic skills strand, most students answered that they were unfamiliar with constructed-response tests, but they considered them engaging and challenging…they would like them to be used during the learning process.”

Mexico

“The scorer training and scoring exercise proved to be eye openers…This exercise was instrumental in generating clearer understandings of the conceptual framework of competencies, and encouraged critical reflections on teaching practices”

Japan

“The framing of questions to make students ‘think like an engineer’ was innovative to some [faculty] – prompting them to [re-]consider how they taught their students, what they expected of them and how they were assessed”

Ontario, Canada
Some benefits already gained from the Feasibility Study

- Greater awareness of learning outcomes across higher education sector and within participating institutions

- Deeper insights into importance, complexity and challenges of measuring learning outcomes in higher education:
  - each country has unique arrangements, history and context
  - the student body has expanded and become more diverse
  - society’s expectations of higher education have increased
  - higher education institutions are largely autonomous and may set different priorities
  - higher education institutions may have several missions and carry them out in quite different ways:
    - teaching and learning
    - research and innovation
    - engagement with industry and communities
Conclusions for future AHELO development

Need to:

- clarify the purpose of AHELO
- better understand and work through implications of higher education complexities for conceptualising AHELO before moving on to technical development of instruments
- carry out a great deal more work to develop a full survey proposal
- allow more time for implementation in participating countries and institutions
- ensure future instrument(s) will actually help higher education institutions achieve better learning outcomes
Clarifying the purpose of AHELO

What AHELO is not

- Not a measure of HEIs overall performance
- Not a measure of country higher education performance
- Not designed for accountability
- Not designed for ranking
- Not a measure of teacher or teaching quality
- Not a measure for assessing individual students
- Not a qualification for students

What AHELO should be

- Provide higher education institutions with feedback on the learning outcomes of their students and which they can use to foster improvement in student learning outcomes
- Some countries want AHELO to serve a public policy goal beyond providing insights for the institutions assessed – need to consider how these wider goals could be addressed without compromising the low-stakes, formative nature of AHELO.
Some of the conceptual complexities facing AHELO future development

- How to develop an AHELO that is both:
  - internationally comparable
  - relevant and meaningful to higher education institutions across a spectrum of diverse institutional missions, student mix and priorities

- How to define learning outcomes
  - what competencies are important:
    - generic versus discipline skills
    - set by academics or by employers
  - how these competencies can best be measured

- What data do institutions need from AHELO to foster improvement
  - student performance compared with others
  - comparison of cohorts through time
  - progress of individual students (value added)

- How could AHELO be applied to teaching and learning practices within the institution

- How to persuade sufficient higher education institutions to participate to provide robust and meaningful comparisons
Need an up-to-date framework of higher education landscape

- Situate AHELO within broader framework including other measures and instruments designed to promote higher education learning outcomes.

- Facilitate systematic comparison across all the measures and instruments possible at each level:
  - discipline
  - institution
  - national
  - international

- Strengthen understanding of what different approaches contribute to:
  - enhanced learning outcomes for students
  - stronger performance across higher education sector

- Understand how each measure actually leads to improved learning outcomes and how different measures can (or should) interact.

- Clarify tensions to be resolved between measures and instruments that serve goals of:
  - accountability
  - transparency
  - improvement
Why emphasise a framework approach to measuring learning outcomes

Having a framework is useful and adds value in itself:

- generate insights into:
  - how different parts of higher education system interact; and
  - why some elements may function more/less effectively than others

- provide a tool that policymakers and institutions could use to assess other options for strengthening learning outcomes (aside from AHELO)

Would help to guide AHELO future development by:

- identify how AHELO can add most value to overall goal
- provide an anchor for working through the conceptual complexities
- clarify key features that AHELO needs to be useful to institutions
- enable more systematic evaluation of benefits and costs of AHELO compared with other measures
Thank you

For further information: www.oecd.org/edu/AHELO